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Migration and Cultural Hybridity of the Malaysian diaspora in the United Kingdom

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I declare that this thesis has been composed by me and that the work presented herein is entirely my own. It has not been submitted for any other degree or professional qualification at this or any other institution. A small section of this thesis was recently published in the form of a scientific article, where I discussed in general some of the themes, in *Résonances*, vol. 20, titled: "The Representation Crisis: The Underrepresented Malaysian Ethnic Minorities", in 2023. Additionally, another publication, which discusses other themes of this thesis, is currently underway. I have also discussed some themes from my thesis at various scientific conferences to showcase my research work.

All sources of information utilised in this thesis have been duly cited and credited according to the required academic practices. I have explicitly acknowledged any discussions that have contributed to the development of this thesis within the appropriate sections of the text.

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I affirm that all the statements and declarations made above are true to the best of my knowledge and belief.

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LIST OF ACRONYMS AND TERMS

UK: United Kingdom

E: England

S: Scotland

NI: Northern Ireland

UA: Unassigned

ONS: Office of National Statistics

UN: United Nations

Bumiputeras: Indigenous Malay population and various indigenous peoples of East Malaysia

Non-Bumiputeras: Individuals who are not part of the indigenous Malay or other indigenous ethnic groups, including but is not limited to, Chinese, Indian and mixed-ethnic descents

Pendatang: Foreigner

Rakyat: The people

Kampongs: Villages

Rukunegara: National ideology

Barat: West Malaysia

Timur: East Malaysia

Ketuanan Melayu: Malay supremacy

Keretapi Tanah Melayu (KTM): Railway line

Orang asli: Indigenous or original people

Malay adat: Malay custom

PART 1

RESEARCH FRAMEWORK

1.1. Introduction to part 1

The first part of the thesis provides an overview of the research, which delves into the phenomena of migration, identity construction, and cultural amalgamation among Malaysians living in the United Kingdom. The study commences by examining the complex aspects of identity and its significant influence on an individual's perception, behaviour, and social interactions, underscoring the importance of shared identity in cultivating a sense of affiliation. The research probes into the continuous transformation of identities within societal frameworks, with a focus on elements such as nationality, religion, culture, and ethnicity.

The core of the thesis is an analysis of how diverse ethnic groups from Malaysia challenge traditional notions of British identity, shaped by the historical connections between Malaysia and the United Kingdom. By centring on the Malaysian diaspora, the research depicts how these individuals merge their cultural legacy with British elements, leading to the emergence of composite identities. It also scrutinises the processes of integration and assimilation into British society, taking into account factors such as community establishment, modification of cultural customs, and the repercussions of pivotal occurrences like shifts in immigration policies.

The research extensively investigates the fluid nature of identity and affiliation within diasporic contexts. It aims to fill the lacunae in the current academic literature by concentrating on the relatively unexplored Malaysian diaspora in the United Kingdom, especially those who migrated after the 1990s. The guiding questions for the study encompass determinants influencing Malaysian migration to the United Kingdom, strategies for managing identity and affiliation in a multicultural setting, redefinitions of home and affiliation, and the impact of intricate sentiments towards Malaysia on personal identity.

Adopting a qualitative research methodology, the thesis employs comprehensive interviews to gather narratives and viewpoints from Malaysian immigrants. This methodological preference facilitates a detailed exploration of issues related to identity that are often neglected in quantitative studies. The adaptability and depth of the qualitative method are considered crucial for deciphering the intricacies of identity negotiation and cultural assimilation within the Malaysian diaspora.

1.2. Introduction to the thesis

The exploration of identity has been a quintessential pursuit for humankind, marking an enduring quest that probes into the existential workings of the self within a perpetually evolving world. This quest for understanding identity is characterised by its elusive quality, encompassing a broad array of nuances and complexities that defy simple categorisation or understanding. Due to its ethereal nature, identity varies significantly from one individual to another, being subject to a wide range of implicit and abstract interpretations that challenge our comprehension. Identity assumes a critical role across various dimensions of human life, exerting a profound impact on the very core of our being. It influences our thoughts, behaviours, and interactions, shaping our understanding of ourselves and the world around us. The array of identities that individuals encounter and embody is vast and varied, including but not limited to singular, exclusive, plural, and bifurcated identities. These distinctions highlight the manifold nature of identity, reflecting the complex relationship between individuality and collectivity. The engagement with a collective identity, in particular, necessitates a significant level of human interaction and communal activity. This aspect of identity underlines the social fabric of human existence, illustrating how shared identities can foster a sense of belonging and connectivity among diverse groups of people. Through the lens of collective identity, one can observe the myriad ways in which individuals come together, sharing experiences and narratives that reflect the diversity and depth of human life.

Furthermore, the expression and experience of identity within societal contexts expose the dynamic and fluid nature of how one defines oneself in relation to others. As societies evolve, so do the constructs of identity, challenging individuals to continually navigate and renegotiate their sense of self with respect to changing cultural, social, and global landscapes. Identification encompasses the process of aligning oneself with a specific group or embracing multiple affiliations, thereby facilitating a sense of connection among individuals globally. This phenomenon is predominantly an unconscious effort, influenced by a myriad of factors that are largely independent of volition. However, it is essential to acknowledge the presence of an element of choice within this process. The act of identification can, to some extent, be shaped by deliberate decisions, allowing individuals to navigate their connections and affiliations with a degree of agency. It is a combination of how one sees oneself and how others see them—it is an internal and an external human affair. A socially recognised position, as understood within the framework of identity, refers to the role or status an individual occupies within the societal hierarchy, which is acknowledged and validated by others. This recognition by peers and

society at large plays a pivotal role in shaping one's self-conception and the perception of others. Such positions can range from professional roles and cultural affiliations to more personal identifiers related to lifestyle, beliefs, or hobbies. The control individuals possess in forming their own identities is a convoluted aspect of this social recognition. While societal norms, expectations, and the broader cultural milieu impose certain constraints and influences, individuals actively engage in the process of identity formation through choices, actions, and expressions. This dynamic exchange between societal influences and personal agency emphasises the complexity of identity as both a social construct and a personal effort.

Individuals navigate through and negotiate with the available cultural symbols, narratives, and roles to carve out a sense of self that resonates with their personal experiences, values, and aspirations. This process involves a degree of reflexivity, where one becomes aware of the social roles and expectations and selectively incorporates, modifies, or rejects these elements in the construction of one's identity. Hence, while society provides the templates and categories for identity, the individual plays a critical role in personalising and internalising these elements, crafting an identity that is both socially recognisable and personally meaningful. Moreover, the capacity to influence and control one's identity is not evenly distributed across all individuals and groups. Factors such as socioeconomic status, ethnicity, gender, and cultural background can significantly impact the degree of agency one has in shaping one's identity. Despite these disparities, the pursuit of authenticity and self-definition remains a fundamental aspect of the human experience, highlighting the inherent tension between conformity to social norms and the desire for individual expression.

Generally, identity is linked to citizenship, ethnicity, and on occasion, religious sentiments. The allegiances that precede these identities influence social and political equilibrium. Stuart Hall, a renowned cultural theorist, in *The Question of Cultural Identity* (1996), articulates that identity is a status that constantly evolves, depending on how it is constructed and articulated, driven by push-and-pull factors especially in a society with multiple and diverse identities.

> The very process of identification, through which we project ourselves into our cultural identities, has become more open-ended, variable, and problematic. […] This produces the post-modern subject, conceptualized as having no fixed, essential, or permanent identity. Identity becomes a "moveable feast": formed and transformed continuously in relation to the

> ways we are represented or addressed in the cultural systems which surround us. (Hall, 1987). It is historically, not biologically, defined. The subject assumes different identities at different times, identities which are not unified around a coherent "self." Within us are contradictory identities, pulling in different directions, so that our identifications are continuously being shifted about. If we feel we have a unified identity from birth to death, it is only because we construct a comforting story or "narrative of the self" about ourselves (see Hall, 1990). The fully unified, completed, secure, and coherent identity is a fantasy, Instead, as the systems of meaning and cultural representation multiply, we are confronted by a bewildering, fleeting multiplicity of possible identities, any one of which we could identify with - at least temporarily. (Hall, 1996: 598).

This passage examines identity in the "post-modern" context, suggesting that identity is not fixed or inherent but is continuously shaped and reshaped by cultural interactions. Hall's view posits that the postmodern individual's identity is a "moveable feast", constantly in flux and defined more by historical contexts than by biology. It questions the notion of a coherent, unified self, suggesting instead that individuals navigate through a variety of identities over time, none of which are permanently fixed. The concept of a consistent identity "from birth to death" is argued to be a narrative constructed for comfort, rather than a reality. As cultural systems expand, individuals are presented with an ever-increasing array of potential identities, suggesting that identity is not a stable or unified construct but a dynamic and ongoing process of negotiation and change. This perspective reiterates the impact of cultural and social influences on identity formation, emphasising the fluidity and multiplicity of the self in the face of diverse cultural representations.

The aforementioned perspective, which emphasises the significant influence of cultural and social factors on the formation of identity, underlines its inherent fluidity and multiplicity and provides a crucial framework for understanding the complexities introduced by migration. Migration catalyses a transformative process in individuals, compelling them to reconceptualise their sense of self in relation to a new group identity. This redefinition is deeply emotional and is predicated on various foundational aspects such as nationality, religion, culture, and ethnicity. These elements serve as critical markers through which individuals navigate their positioning and establish their identities in relation to others within a diverse cultural landscape. The process of migration, particularly in the context of this thesis, draws

attention to the emphatic nature of national identities like Britishness in the United Kingdom. The continuous influx of different ethnic groups and cultures into the United Kingdom has historically fostered a societal fabric that is inherently diverse and multilayered. This diversity challenges and redefines the conventional boundaries of national identity, suggesting that Britishness is not a static or monolithic concept but one that evolves in response to the changing demographics and cultural landscapes brought about by migration. Such transformations are indicative of a broader process of social and cultural negotiation, wherein the presence of diverse ethnic groups and cultures within a single societal framework necessitates the adoption of values such as coexistence, tolerance, and stability. These values are not merely abstract ideals but are integral to the practical maintenance of social harmony in a multicultural context. The interaction between longstanding residents and newcomers through migration leads to a reassessment of what it means to be British, highlighting the role of cultural diversity in shaping national identity.

In connecting these concepts, it becomes evident that the fluidity and multiplicity of identity, as influenced by cultural and social factors, are vividly manifested in the context of migration. The engagement with new cultural representations and the emotional investment in new group identities reflect the ongoing negotiation of self in relation to the broader societal matrix. Thus, the impact of migration on national identity, particularly in terms of challenging and expanding the definition of constructs like Britishness, exemplifies the synergy between individual identities and the collective cultural systems within which they are embedded. However, while the reflection on cultural diversity is integral to understanding and appreciating the multiplicity of identities within a nation, it also has the potential to accentuate differences, leading to divisions rather than unity. In this context, Cooper and Lodge in *Faith in the Nation* argue:

> […] society needs to work together to articulate a stronger common sense of British identity. Britishness […] offers an appropriate framework for the integration of ethnic and religious minorities. (in *IPPR*, 2008: 13)

This viewpoint calls for a reconceptualisation of national identity to embrace Britain's diverse cultures, stressing a community-driven approach for an inclusive, representative identity. It sees "Britishness" as a means to integrate and balance diversity with unity. This necessitates revisiting historical, cultural, and political contexts to craft a national identity that celebrates diversity as essential. This discourse leads to pivotal inquiries concerning the essence of

Britishness in the context of migration and integration. Reflecting on cultural diversity brings to the fore the potential for emphasising differences, yet it concurrently presents an opportunity to articulate a stronger, more inclusive sense of British identity—one that effectively integrates ethnic and religious minorities into the broader narrative of Britishness. These reflections raise crucial questions about the nature of assimilation and belonging in a multicultural Britain. Is Britishness to be understood as a mosaic of various cultures, or as a singular identity—'white' British[1]? When individuals migrate to the United Kingdom and attain permanent residency or British citizenship, the question of assimilation emerges as a critical point of contention. Does becoming a permanent resident (PR) or British citizen necessitate full assimilation into a British way of life, or can one maintain distinct ethnic and cultural identities, potentially being perceived as a foreigner or 'British foreigner'? The process of becoming a PR or British citizen thus intersects with broader debates on identity, integration, and the meaning of national belonging in a diverse society.

The examination of ethnic minority immigrants in the United Kingdom has consistently been at the forefront of my scholarly pursuits, primarily due to my personal experiences as an immigrant in France. This alignment of personal background with academic interest has laid the foundation for my focus within this area of study. Despite encountering a breadth of research encompassing various diasporas, including Indian, Pakistani, Jamaican, Kurdish, and Turkish communities, I observed a notable scarcity of scholarly work on the Malaysian diaspora. Acknowledging an opportunity to contribute to the field, I was motivated to explore and expand upon this gap, thus initiating my research journey into the Malaysian diaspora in the United Kingdom. My position as a Malaysian immigrant provides a unique vantage point from which to analyse this diaspora. It affords me an outsider's perspective that, as Afua Hirsch, a British author and activist, articulates in her book, *Brit(ish): On Race, Identity and Belonging*, enables the observer to question and scrutinise attitudes towards "race and identity" with a level of "fascination" and insight uniquely available to an outsider.

> Observe and question our attitudes towards race and identity, driven by fascination only an outsider can have – the ability to see things that only an outsider can see. (2018: 19)

[1] Belonging to the majority population: "In 2021, 81.7% (48.7 million) of usual residents in England and Wales identified their ethnic group within the high-level "White" category, a decrease from 86.0% (48.2 million) in the 2011 Census." ONS, "Ethnic group, England and Wales": *Census 2021.*

Hirsch contends that this external standpoint allows for the recognition and examination of details and variables that may remain invisible to those within the cultural or national context. Thus, my research aims not only to fill a scholarly void but also to leverage my distinct position as both an observer and a member of a diasporic community to clarify the complexities and challenges faced by the Malaysian diaspora in the United Kingdom.

Building upon this foundation, it becomes apparent that the migration of Malaysians to the United Kingdom is not merely an isolated phenomenon but a specific chapter in the broader narrative of global human movement—a narrative that is salient to history. This thesis initiates an in-depth exploration into the existence of the Malaysian diaspora within the United Kingdom. This demographic segment, though previously noted for its lack of extensive documentation, offers invaluable perspectives on the reasons and strategies for migration, the ways in which the transformation of identity has taken place, and the degrees of intercultural exchange within the ambit of contemporary globalisation. The investigation illustrates how Malaysians, motivated by economic reasons such as education and employment opportunities, alongside family reunification and lifestyle migration, embark on a journey that integrates migration strategies into their lives. This journey sees them traversing the liminal realms between their cultural heritage and their current context in Britain, engaging in a multilayered process of identity fusion. This allows them to craft a unique blend of identities that encapsulates the essence of both their Malaysian roots and their experiences in the British milieu, highlighting the complex interconnections between migration motives and the evolution of personal and collective identities in a broader context. This phenomenon exemplifies the broader experience of transnational migrants, who fluidly negotiate and reconcile aspects of multiple cultures, thereby embodying the complex realities of global diasporic existence. It is within this context that the historical relationship between Malaysia and the United Kingdom gains relevance, characterised by colonial dynamics, where the Malaysian populace was subjugated by the dominant British imperial culture. This colonial context positioned Malaysians as participants in a sociopolitical hierarchy where they were relegated to the status of marginalised entities or second-class citizens, subjected to the oppressive ‘divide and rule policies’ of the dominant British culture. This historical backdrop significantly shaped the interactions and power structures between the two nations, embedding a complex colonial legacy that has implications for understanding the contemporary Malaysian diaspora in the United Kingdom.

At the core of this discourse and the emergence from such a legacy, is the concept of hybridity in identity and sense of belonging, a phenomenon magnified among the Malaysian community in the United Kingdom. The formation of identity in the context of diverse societies is not merely a straightforward amalgamation of cultural elements; instead, it represents a sophisticated negotiation and adaptation process. These processes through which individuals undertake to harmonise the diverse influences of their surroundings to forge their distinct identities reflect a complex mechanism. Specifically, in my observations, Malaysians exhibit a propensity for adopting multiple identities, a tendency that becomes more pronounced when they reside in countries or societies categorised by a high level of cultural diversity. This diversity of identities among Malaysians epitomises personal identity formation and the sociocultural dynamics prevalent within their environments. Migration prompts individuals to see themselves as part of a group, placing emotional value on this affiliation. This collective identification, based on nationality, religion, culture, and ethnicity, challenges and possibly redefines notions of Britishness in the face of migration's transformative impact. At this juncture, the traditional values of Malaysia intersect with British norms, culminating in the development of unique identities and a sense of belonging that surpass the simplistic dichotomy of being exclusively Malaysian or wholly British. This blending highlights the fluidity of identity in the transnational sphere, where cultural intersections contribute to the evolution of complex personal and collective identities. This hybridity encapsulates the essence of what Hall describes as the "post-modern subject", whose identity is continuously formed and transformed in response to the cultural systems surrounding them (1996: 598). Identity, in this context, is historically constructed, variable, and devoid of a fixed essence, evolving in relation to the myriad of cultural representations and meanings one encounters.

The integration and assimilation of the Malaysian diaspora into British society are central to their transnational narrative, encompassing a broad array of experiences from the formation of communities and social networks to the adaptation of culinary traditions and religious practices. The theoretical insights of postcolonial and cultural theorist Homi K. Bhabha provide an understanding of these phenomena. In *The Location of Culture* (1994), Bhabha theorises the notion of the "in-between" space that facilitates the emergence of a "Third Space" and is particularly salient. This concept posits that the interaction between Malaysian and British cultures gives birth to a novel, distinct entity that surpasses mere cultural blending, thereby enabling individuals to mediate their multicultural heritage. This process of cultural negotiation and identity formation, as experienced by the Malaysian diaspora in British society, exemplifies

the dynamic and fluid nature of cultural identity within a globalised context. Language plays a crucial role in this dimension, acting simultaneously as a tool for integration and a potential obstacle. The flexibility and the use of English variations by Malaysians reflect broader themes of adaptability and identity negotiation.

Furthermore, the colonial legacy shared between Malaysia and the United Kingdom adds a layer of nuance to the diaspora's contemporary experiences, particularly in terms of representation. This historical context informs the identities and life prospects of Malaysians in the United Kingdom, frequently casting them as peripheral figures within a dominantly Western culture. The discussion also extends to the political domain, notably the implications of changing immigration policies and the impact of Brexit on the Malaysian community. These political developments significantly alter Malaysian individuals' sense of belonging and status within British society. Employment trends further elucidate the narrative of integration, highlighting the opportunities and challenges that affect their economic stability and social mobility. The scholarship of K.J. Ratnam, a Malaysian political scientist, explores the notion of homeland loyalty and longing for home among Malaysians in *Identity, Nationhood and State-building in Malaysia* (2019). I then extend this to the United Kingdom, adding another layer of nuance to the immigrant diasporic experiences. Ratnam's work gives prominence to the emotional and psychological dimensions of living in the diaspora, illustrating how these feelings of allegiance and yearning for the homeland interact with the realities of life in the host land. Together, these elements paint a comprehensive picture of the Malaysian diasporic journey, epitomising the continuous negotiation of identity, belonging, and loyalty within the interstices of cultural, political, and social landscapes.

This thesis, therefore, aims to provide a comprehensive analysis of the Malaysian diaspora in the United Kingdom, unfolding the process of migration, identity formation, and integration. The body of work seeks to contribute to a deeper understanding of the migrant experience through migration. It explores how the reciprocation between social identity, political views, employment, language, and historical legacies, and the implications of migration shape the ongoing negotiation of identity and belonging in a globalised world. Through this exploration, we are reminded of the fluidity of identity—a "moveable feast" in the "Third Space" that is continuously shaped by our interactions with the world around us, offering a lens through which we can observe and question attitudes towards ethnicity, identity, a sense of belonging and yearning for home.

1.3. Research: Rationale, questions, goal and significance

Rationale

This research was informed by my curiosity to explore ethnic minority immigrants in the United Kingdom. During my master's programme in British studies, I engaged deeply with the themes of assimilation and integration of ethnic minorities in the United Kingdom, particularly immigrants, culminating in a research paper on the subject. This academic pursuit offered me a mirror to reflect upon my own identity transformation, sparked by my migration to France two decades ago. This period of introspection led me to grapple with existential questions about my identity, belonging, and place in the world. Initially identifying exclusively as Malaysian, the passage of time and the depth of my experiences in France have variegated my self-perception, leading me to evolve and adopt a dual identity as Malaysian-French/French-Malaysian (*Franco-Malaisienne*) at this point in time. This evolution reflects the shifting nature of personal identity within a collective identity, acknowledging that my self-identification could transform yet again in the future.

My journey has been marked by a continuous examination of my diasporic experiences, encompassing efforts to belong, overcome language barriers, and navigate cultural differences. I have found myself oscillating between feeling like an insider and an outsider, belonging simultaneously to two homes yet not fully belonging to either. This duality has manifested as a constant negotiation between two spaces, influenced by both push and pull factors relative to my homeland and my host land. The internal struggle has been compounded by experiences of being treated as a second-class citizen in my homeland, where I faced disparities in access to education, employment, and land ownership. Conversely, in France, my host land, I have experienced a semblance of equality, though disparities still persist, particularly in terms of ethnicity, socioeconomic status and employment opportunities. This journey has been a deliberate navigation of belonging and identity, challenging and reshaping my understanding of self and place in the home-host-world realm.

Thus, my research on ethnic minority immigrants in the United Kingdom, particularly the Malaysian diaspora, is deeply influenced by my personal journey as an immigrant in France, aligning closely with my academic passions. Despite the wealth of studies on various diasporas, the scarcity of scholarly attention to Malaysians in the United Kingdom stood out, prompting me to delve into this under-researched area. Leveraging my unique perspective as a Malaysian immigrant, I aim to draw attention to this community. This interest has galvanised

me to carry out a critical examination of the Malaysian diaspora in the United Kingdom, specifically targeting those who have migrated since the 1990s. It is driven by a desire to dissect the multifaceted aspects of migration, identity transformation, societal integration, and belonging within the context of a diverse and postcolonial Britain. Despite the general acknowledgment of migration phenomena, the specific trajectories and experiences of Malaysians, framed by historical, economic, and cultural considerations, remain largely under researched. The study seeks to elucidate how these individuals, originating from a former British colony, navigate their identities and integration processes in light of significant global shifts during the late 20th and early 21st centuries, thereby contributing to a deeper understanding of their distinct position within the British multicultural framework. A discernible lack of empirical research on the Malaysian populace in this context underscores the need for this thesis dissertation to address this scholarly void, elevating the stories of an often-overlooked demographic to provide new insights across various academic fields. The research method involves employing open-ended questions in qualitative interviews, affording participants the latitude to express their views and reflections. Such a strategy, expressed in section 1.5, facilitates the emergence of narratives that deepen our understanding of migration's inherent complexities, introducing an alternative viewpoint on cultural assimilation/integration and identity construction in a pluralistic society.

The impetus for this study emanates from several observations. Primarily, the preference of Malaysians for the United Kingdom over other destinations like France for migration invites inquiry into the factors influencing such choices. Additionally, the dispersal of the Malaysian diaspora, mainly in London, to wider regions within the host country suggests changing patterns of migration and assimilation. The perception among Malaysian immigrants of underrepresentation, despite residing in a purportedly inclusive multicultural society, prompts a re-evaluation of concepts such as home, identity, and community within diasporic contexts. This demographic's unique position, transitioning from being citizens of a former British colony to residents or citizens of a modern, multicultural United Kingdom facing challenges such as ever-changing immigration policies, enriches the analysis of Malaysian migrants' experiences, their identity negotiation, and their conceptualisation of 'home' in a foreign setting. Moreover, the conflicted relationship many Malaysians in the United Kingdom have with the notion of 'home'—torn between the dichotomy of nostalgia and longing for their homeland while preferring to stay abroad for a better life—highlights the complexity between identity and belonging. This duality, manifesting in the pursuit of a composite identity that

blends Malaysian and British elements, underlines the diverse motivations behind migration. It encompasses the yearning for equality and the nostalgia for cultural and familial connections, illustrating how these factors collectively shape migration decisions and the diasporic experience.

Questions

Understanding the migration process and the experiences of Malaysian immigrants in the United Kingdom is crucial for unpacking the complexities of identity transformation, cultural negotiation, and emotional resilience in transnational contexts. This research centrally investigates the lived experiences of Malaysian immigrants in the United Kingdom, focusing on identity formation, integration, and concepts of home. It aims to explore individual and collective identities within the British sociocultural landscape, examining how Malaysian immigrants navigate their sense of belonging and identity against the backdrop of multiculturalism and potential marginalisation, which may cast them as perpetual 'outsiders.'

The research is guided by several critical questions:

1. **Migration decisions and choice of destination**:
    - Why do Malaysians migrate, and who are the individuals migrating to the UK?
    - What factors influence Malaysian migrants in selecting the United Kingdom over other potential destinations for migration? This inquiry seeks to explore the underlying motivations for their preference for the United Kingdom, taking into account the historical connections, cultural affiliations, perceived opportunities, and overall quality of life that distinguish the United Kingdom from other countries.
    - Push-and-pull factors: What are the socioeconomic, political, and personal factors influencing Malaysians' decisions to migrate and their feelings towards returning? This seeks to examine the motivations for migration, acknowledging the complexity of factors beyond economic, including social, political, and personal reasons.
2. **Identity, belonging and cultural hybridity**:
    - How do Malaysian immigrants manage the complexities of identity and belonging within the British multicultural environment?

- How do Malaysian immigrants in the United Kingdom develop and negotiate hybrid identities that merge Malaysian and British cultural elements across different social contexts? This inquiry aims to analyse the formation and adaptation of such composite identities, examining the dynamics of cultural integration and identity negotiation within diverse social environments.

3. **Transformation of 'home'**:

    - How are the concepts of 'home' and 'belonging' redefined for Malaysians living in the United Kingdom? This seeks to investigate the impact of migration on the emotional ties of Malaysian migrants to the idea of home, examining shifts in feelings of belonging, experiences of alienation, and the duality of their identities between Malaysia and the United Kingdom.
    - How can cultural diversity and hybridity be assessed through the varied experiences of Malaysian immigrants? By examining their lived realities, the study aims to capture the nuanced ways in which immigrants' cultural hybridity contributes to broader narratives of diversity.

4. **Yearning for 'home'**:

    - How do ambivalent feelings towards the homeland influence the identities of Malaysian immigrants in the United Kingdom? This question seeks to probe the complex emotions associated with yearning for Malaysia, exploring the impact of deep-seated connections, memories, and cultural practices on the immigrants' sense of self and identity.
    - How can the emotional impact of migration on these individuals be effectively evaluated? This question addresses the psychological and emotional dimensions of migration, focusing on resilience and adaptation.

These questions aim to illuminate the Malaysian immigrant experience in the United Kingdom, focusing on migration, identity, belonging, and the interplay of cultural, social, and personal factors. The research contributes to understanding how migration reshapes identity and belonging while exploring cultural diversity and hybridity within global migration patterns.

Goal

The principal goal of this research is to provide a thorough examination of the identity, sense of belonging, and cultural adaptation processes among Malaysian immigrants, aiming to

enrich the academic discourse on migration, identity construction and sense of belonging within diasporic communities. It seeks to explore the evolution of their identity in the United Kingdom and how it is influenced by Malaysia's ethnocentric policies. By utilising exploratory methods, this study seeks to build upon and extend current theoretical frameworks in the fields of migration and diaspora, as well as notions and concepts of identity, multiculturalism, and others, presenting fresh perspectives on the experiences of Malaysian migrants with historical connections to the British Empire. This endeavour is not only aimed at enhancing scholarly discussions but also at influencing policy, practices, and decision-making processes to address prevailing issues of social justice, all within the relevant theoretical frameworks.

Employing a qualitative research methodology, the study delves into the migration experiences of this particular diaspora in the United Kingdom, particularly focusing on those within the working-class socioeconomic group, aged 20 and above, who have obtained permanent residency in the United Kingdom, thereby excluding students and temporary residents. The choice of a qualitative approach, favoured over quantitative methods, is due to factors such as the specific qualitative approach I desired for this thesis, and the small size of the participant pool that restricts the ability to secure a sample that represents the entire Malaysian community in the United Kingdom. Despite this limitation, the research method aligns with the objective of exploring detailed, previously unaddressed narratives and stories, aiming to uncover the experiences, motives, and challenges encountered by this specific group. Initially, the research focuses on questions surrounding how Malaysian immigrants navigate their ethnocultural identity and integrate into British society. However, as the study progressed, the focus shifted toward understanding more nuanced identity transformations, which emerged through participant narratives and insights from scientific literature. I began to uncover identity shifts that revealed how experiences of migration and exposure to the multicultural United Kingdom environment reshape participants' identities, often in response to the broader landscape of the United Kingdom, in contrast to Malaysia's ethnically stratified social structure.

In the evolving landscape of contemporary scholarship, the imperative to transcend traditional disciplinary boundaries has never been more pronounced. As a researcher poised at the confluence of several scholarly areas in British studies, my intellectual enterprise seeks to navigate the terrains of postcolonial studies, cultural studies, diasporic studies and the polygonal experiences of diasporic communities. This interdisciplinary approach allows for a comprehensive exploration of the cultural implications that arise from postcolonial, migration

and diasporic conditions. The specificity of my research interest lies in the examination of the Malaysian diaspora within the United Kingdom. This focus is motivated by the recognition that the Malaysian diaspora presents a unique microcosm of intersecting ethnicities, cultural elements, gender dynamics, and the pressing issues of integration and belonging. By narrowing the scope to this particular diasporic community, my research aspires to delve deeply into the multiple ways in which Malaysian individuals in the United Kingdom navigate their identities, cultural affiliations, and social realities amidst the challenges and opportunities presented by their transnational experiences.

This focused methodology does not signify a lack of interest in more extensive comparative studies; instead, it represents a deliberate choice to immerse myself in a detailed and nuanced analysis of narratives derived from interviews with participants. As a reminder, the Malaysian populace is a mosaic of various cultures, ethnicities, and religions, offering a rich field for exploration. Within this scope, I believe this diverse demographic landscape offers a wealth of opportunities for in-depth ethnographic research, providing multiple perspectives and interpretations that can deepen the understanding of its complex social fabric. Given the relatively underexplored nature of the Malaysian diaspora in the United Kingdom, I have chosen to conduct my research within the scope of British studies, which encompasses a wide range of areas such as history, migration, geography, diaspora studies, postcolonial studies, Commonwealth studies, sociology, ethnography, cultural studies, and politics.

While my primary emphasis is on the Malaysian diaspora, I remain open to conducting targeted comparisons between various ethnic groups within this community and other diasporic ethnic minorities whenever pertinent. This qualitative inquiry is designed to unravel the intersection of ethnicity, culture, and social integration as experienced within a distinct diasporic milieu. Through this lens, I aim to capture the depth and complexity of individual and collective experiences, which provide insightful perspectives on the lived realities of diasporic communities. By such a focus, the research can foreground the views of a typically underrepresented group, broadening the horizons of migration and diaspora studies. It intends to challenge and transform my own perceptions and assumptions as a researcher regarding migration, identity, multiculturalism, and belonging. The lived experiences of Malaysians in the United Kingdom offer a fertile ground for exploring the concrete and tangible aspects of diasporic life, moving beyond political discourse to uncover the personal narratives, cultural productions, and social dynamics that define their experiences.

Future research undertakings may indeed expand this focus to include comparative analyses of the Malaysian diaspora in different global contexts, such as contrasting the experiences of Malaysians in London with those in Paris, or a broader examination of the Malaysian diaspora across other European countries. Such comparative work would build upon the foundational insights gained from this focused study, contributing to a more comprehensive interpretation of diasporic experiences across diverse geographical and cultural landscapes. By situating my research within the broader domain of interdisciplinary inquiry and specifically focusing on the Malaysian diaspora in the United Kingdom, I aim to contribute to an empathetic understanding of postcolonial and diasporic experiences. This research not only challenges conventional academic boundaries but also highlights the importance of personal narratives and cultural expressions in articulating the complexities of identity, belonging, and cultural hybridity in the diasporic context. Ultimately, the goal of this investigation is to deepen the knowledge of how migration affects individuals' perceptions of identity, home, and community, and how these insights can be leveraged to inform practices, policies, and initiatives that promote social justice.

Significance of the study

My thesis strives to enrich academic discourse by delving into the experiences of the Malaysian diaspora in the United Kingdom, focusing on amplifying the voices of underrepresented communities and introducing fresh perspectives on multiculturalism, integration, and identity. It examines notions of living in a 'hotel' rather than a 'home'—a metaphor that encapsulates the experience of immigrants residing in host countries within a multicultural framework, in order to understand immigrants' feelings of belonging, underrepresentation, and the quest for identity. This research seeks to enhance our understanding of these issues, potentially influencing social policies, and fostering a more inclusive and representative society. By exploring the journey of Malaysian immigrants within the context of globalisation, the study contributes to British, postcolonial, migration, cultural and diaspora studies by revealing insights into cultural adaptation and hybridity. It advocates for inclusive and culturally sensitive immigration policies (particularly during census-taking to include Malaysians), aiming to promote societal cohesion and recognise immigrants' diverse contributions, thereby challenging conventional notions of belonging in the landscape of globalisation.

1.4. Thesis Structure

The thesis presents a comprehensive exploration of the migration dynamics from Malaysia to the United Kingdom, framed within an academic structure that includes a research framework, literature review, theoretical background, empirical findings, and a conclusive synthesis.

Part 1 of the thesis, titled "Research Framework", lays the groundwork for a detailed investigation into the migration dynamics between Malaysia and the United Kingdom. It embarks on an introduction that not only introduces the subject but also delineates the rationale behind the study, the research questions it seeks to answer, its objectives and overall significance. This section ensures a well-defined path for the exploration that follows. Furthermore, it offers a brief overview of the thesis structure, providing readers with a roadmap of the study's layout. Then, a thorough examination of the methodological framework adopted in the research ensues. It covers a range of crucial aspects, including the design of the research, the selection of methodologies appropriate for empirical data collection, the processes involved in recruiting participants and collecting data, and the ethical considerations that underpin the study. Furthermore, it expounds on reflexivity, the researcher's personal positionality, the limitations encountered during the study, and the strategies employed for analysing data and classifying themes. Integral to this foundational framework is the empirical evidence gathered through interviews, which unveils the identities of Malaysians who decide to leave their homeland, their reasons for departure, and their rationale for choosing the United Kingdom as their destination. This thesis seamlessly integrates theoretical analysis, drawing upon the works of various scholars, with empirical analysis, employing excerpts from interviews with participants. This approach not only enriches the study with firsthand accounts but also grounds the theoretical discussions in lived experiences, presenting a comprehensive exploration of the migration phenomenon from Malaysia to the United Kingdom.

Part 2, titled "Literature Review", offers a thorough examination of existing scholarly research pertinent to the migration flows from Malaysia to the United Kingdom. This segment meticulously explores Malaysia's complex historical backdrop, detailing the colonial influence, the evolution of postcolonialism, and the multiculturalism that characterises the nation. Key aspects such as the dearth of educational opportunities and economic migration, notably the "brain drain" phenomenon, are scrutinised to understand the motivations behind migration to the United Kingdom. The review then shifts focus to the British immigration

landscape, dissecting its historical roots, the evolution of government policies, and the notable trends and patterns in migration. Delving into the socioeconomic and cultural ramifications of immigration, it brings to light the unique challenges and identity negotiations faced by ethnic minorities like the Malaysian immigrants in the United Kingdom. A succinct summary consolidates the literature review, binding together the extensive research to provide a cohesive academic foundation for the thesis. This section not only contextualises the study within a broader scholarly discourse but also identifies the research gaps that the subsequent parts of the thesis aim to fill, henceforth setting the stage for an in-depth exploration of Malaysian migration to the United Kingdom.

Part 3, "Theoretical Framework", serves as the intellectual cornerstone of the thesis, meticulously introducing and examining the theories central to understanding migration and diaspora. This section is pivotal as it lays out the conceptual lenses through which the phenomena of migration from Malaysia to the United Kingdom are analysed. At its core, the section examines the critical discussions on globalisation and transnationalism, highlighting how these forces shape and are shaped by migration patterns. It then scrutinises the concept of multiculturalism, both as a policy and a lived experience, and its implications for migrant communities. The notion of "unhomeliness" is explored, capturing the sense of alienation and displacement often experienced by migrants. The theorised "Third Space" is discussed as a unique realm where hybrid identities are formed, allowing for the negotiation and reconciliation of cultural differences. The framework pays special attention to the concept of hybridity, a critical tool for understanding how migrants navigate and blend their cultural identities. This theoretical perspective is instrumental in analysing the identity formation processes among Malaysian immigrants in the United Kingdom, providing insight into how they merge elements of Malaysian and British cultures to forge new, hybrid identities. A summary of the theoretical approaches concludes this part, synthesising the discussions and highlighting how these theories apply to the study of Malaysian migration to the United Kingdom. This section not only equips the reader with a robust theoretical toolkit for understanding the forces of migration and identity formation but also paves the way for applying these concepts to the empirical findings in subsequent parts of the thesis.

Part 4, titled "Migration from Malaysia to the United Kingdom', shifts the focus from theoretical discussions to the tangible, lived experiences of individuals, presenting the empirical findings gleaned from participant narratives. This section is crucial as it uncovers the various reasons behind the migration of Malaysians to the United Kingdom, offering a detailed

look at the personal, educational, familial, and employment-related factors that propel individuals to embark on this significant life transition. The analysis shifts focus to the United Kingdom as the host country, exploring the key elements assisting Malaysian immigrants' settlement and integration. English proficiency emerges as vital for a smooth transition into British society. Additionally, the effect of United Kingdom immigration policies on settlement ease is examined, together with the immigrants' hopes and expectations for their new lives in the United Kingdom. This part of the thesis not only presents the empirical findings but also connects these real-world experiences to the theoretical framework established earlier. By doing so, it provides a comprehensive understanding of individual motivations, broader socioeconomic factors, and the regulatory environment, all of which shape the migration journey from Malaysia to the United Kingdom.

Part 5, titled "To Be Malaysian in the United Kingdom", investigates the personal and communal experiences of Malaysian immigrants as they navigate their new lives in the United Kingdom. This section is pivotal as it explores the processes of assimilation and integration, the challenges encountered, and the development of a nuanced ethnocultural identity that encapsulates elements of both Malaysian and British cultures. It begins by examining the dual processes of assimilation and integration, highlighting the delicate balance immigrants strike between adapting to their new environment while preserving their cultural heritage. This section brings to light the nature of integration, where immigrants engage with and contribute to their new society, and assimilation, where they may adopt certain aspects of the local culture to blend in more seamlessly. Challenges are a significant focus of this part, which details the various obstacles faced by this diasporic community, from navigating cultural differences, facing prejudice or discrimination, to the more practical aspects of accessing services and support. The narratives bring to light the resilience and resourcefulness of the Malaysian community in overcoming these hurdles. Central to this discussion is the concept of belonging. This section probes into the emotional and psychological journey toward feeling at home in their new country of residence, exploring how immigrants develop a sense of belonging both within the Malaysian diaspora and the broader British community. It considers the impact of social networks, cultural practices, and communal support in fostering a sense of identity and belonging. The concept of a "Third Space" highlights how Malaysian immigrants develop a hybrid identity that merges Malaysian and British elements, enabling them to honour their heritage while adapting to their new environment. This part provides a comprehensive exploration of the lived experiences of Malaysian immigrants and the complexities of

migration, settlement, and identity formation. Through the lens of “being” and “becoming”, it captures the dynamic and ongoing process of building a life in a new country, showcasing a profound understanding of what it means to be Malaysian in the United Kingdom.

The conclusion succinctly brings the dissertation to a close, summarising key findings, acknowledging research limitations, synthesising findings from empirical data, theoretical discussions, and the literature review, and offering an interpretation and comprehensive view of Malaysian migration to the United Kingdom. This part revisits the research objectives and methodology, highlighting contributions to British, postcolonial, migration, cultural and diaspora studies, multiculturalism, and diaspora identity formation, while also noting areas for future research. Finally, the conclusion reflects on the study’s implications for policymakers, community organisations, and immigrants, underlining its value in informing integration strategies and support services. This caps the study, setting the stage for further exploration into other potential research areas, such as comparative analyses or longitudinal research.

1.5. Methodology

1.5.1. Research design and methodology

To gather empirical data for this research, a qualitative method was given preference in order to study how Malaysian identity may (or may not) have undergone significant transformation in the wake of migration, and to assess the impact of migration on the sense of belonging among Malaysian immigrants in the United Kingdom. The decision to employ a qualitative research approach was driven by the objective of deeply investigating the experiences and perceptions of Malaysian immigrants in the United Kingdom, a group notably underrepresented in existing scientific studies. The dearth of scientific literature on this population points to a gap in the understanding of how migration affects individuals' sense of identity and belonging. Qualitative methods, known for their depth and versatility, offer a powerful tool for exploring and interpreting complex social phenomena that are not easily quantifiable. By leveraging in-depth interviews, the research attempts to uncover nuanced narratives, migration experiences, and diverse perspectives of Malaysian immigrants, furnishing detailed observations and previously unexplored perspectives that quantitative methods might overlook. Therefore, this research project attempted to approach this problem by exploring empirical data collected via in-depth interviews that have certain advantageous attributes. Brinkmann in *The Interview* clarifies the interview approach:

> The structured or standardized research interview has for long been a customary method, but also the qualitative research interview […], with its much more flexible and dialogical form, has become widespread. In a postmodern age, many disciplines have witnessed a boom in qualitative interviewing to the extent that it is sometimes no longer needed to justify why exactly this approach is the best way of going about a specific research project. In this way, we can say that the interview has been naturalized. (in Denzin & Lincoln, 2018: 999)

With the "flexible and dialogical form" that has become common practice in this day and age, I attempted to make sense of and interpret the participants' narratives, which often required considering additional issues or concerns in the ever-changing reality of being human articulated by the participants during the interview. Then, this data was analysed using various correlated concepts and theories on migration, integration and identity as analytical tools—themes that are key to my research.

The genesis of the interviewing strategy as a research tool can be traced back to circa 1900, marked by Charles Booth's seminal work on the social conditions in London through a blend of structured and unstructured interviews. This methodological innovation was subsequently advanced by Sigmund Freud's application of psychoanalytic techniques in the human sciences, as chronicled by Brinkmann (in Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). The ensuing decades saw a proliferation of scholars across various disciplines adopting interviewing as a core research strategy, notably Adorno, Frenkel-Brunswik, Levinson, & Sanford (1950); Kinsey, Pomeroy, & Martin (1948); Dichter (1960); and Platt (2002), each contributing to the evolution and refinement of this method. This historical trajectory underscores the enduring significance of interviewing within academic inquiry to the point that "we live in an interview society" (Brinkmann in Denzin & Lincoln, 2018: 1010), highlighting the interview's pivotal role in both constructing and deconstructing human experiences and societal dynamics into the 21st century.

The methodology followed the qualitative research model for the collection of data. The choice for this model underwent methodological considerations. Initially advised to opt for a mixed-method model, which is a combination of both qualitative and quantitative approaches, I concluded, after deep theoretical and empirical reflections, that the qualitative method was the most appropriate choice for this research. The function of qualitative research is to investigate and understand human experience through identifying, connecting, and finding meaning in the complex qualities of individuals or groups in a specific social setting (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). It is a "situated activity that locates the observer in the world and involves an interpretive naturalistic approach to the world" where attempts are made "to make sense of or interpret phenomena in terms of meanings people bring to them" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018: 43). Using approaches like in-depth interviews in natural settings, questionnaires, and case studies of individual or focus groups, the observer/researcher records and documents the data collected for the exploration of a phenomenon to gain insight into human experiences and patterns through the participants' perspectives that give meaning to their lives. As "we are actively engaged in constructing and reconstructing meanings through our daily interactions—often referred to as the social construction of reality" (Leavy, 2017: 13), such qualitative research utilises various interpretive devices in order to increase the understanding of the subject under study and to define common themes through a pattern-seeking lens, rendering human realities more visible (Denzin &Lincoln, 2018). That is to say, this approach recognises that perceptions of reality are shaped by interactions and cultural

contexts, a concept known as the social construction of reality. Qualitative research methods aim to uncover and understand these subjective experiences and social phenomena by employing interpretive tools like in-depth interviews and thematic analysis. The objective is to identify patterns and themes that reveal the undercurrents of human behaviour and social relationships. By doing so, qualitative research makes the complexities of human experiences more visible and comprehensible, enhancing the understanding of the subject under study through a detailed exploration of individual and collective realities.

The quantitative research methodology is traditionally associated with the exploration of objective theories and the measurement of variables pertinent to social inquiries, such as the ethnic composition of a region or the structure of housing systems. This approach produces data that are numerically quantifiable and subject to statistical analysis, primarily addressing 'what' questions that seek to quantify phenomena (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). In contrast, the qualitative research methodology is fundamentally concerned with elucidating the nature of phenomena, aiming to answer 'how' and 'why' questions. This methodological orientation prioritises an in-depth examination of the complexities and subtleties inherent in social questions and human experiences, such as an individual's or group's sense of belonging, feelings, and identity. Qualitative methods attempt to uncover patterns and insights into these phenomena through detailed exploration, providing a depth of understanding that quantitative methods, with their focus on aggregated data, are inherently incapable of providing.

Careful considerations were made in order to position this thesis in regard to the definition of the "philosophical worldview"[2]. The selected research worldview is social constructionism which involves the study of people's accounts and interpretation of the nature of lived experiences. This worldview suggests that:

> […] we make and remake the social world through our patterns of interaction and interpretive processes, by which we assign meaning to activities, situations, events, gestures, and so forth, […] valu[ing] people's subjective interpretation and understanding of their experiences and circumstances (Leavy, 2017: 13).

[2] Guba uses the term *worldview* to mean "a basic set of beliefs that guide action." Similarly, Lincoln, Lynham and Mertens use the term *paradigms*; Crotty uses the terms *epistemologies* and *ontologies*; and Neuman *broadly conceived research methodologies*. Quoted in *Research Design* by Creswell & Creswell, 2018: 5.

According to Leavy in *Research Design* (2017), this approach acknowledges the fluidity and dynamism of the social world, suggesting that reality is not merely observed but actively shaped by the meanings one ascribes to it through interactions and perceptions. Thus, this research is approached with questions of (social ontology and epistemology). Empirical material is collected (methodology), and it is then studied and interpreted (analysis) (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018: 52-53). According to Crotty (1998), social constructionists try to interpret human behaviour through the use of open-ended questions where participants can share their views of the world based on their own historical and social perspectives (in Creswell & Creswell, 2018: 8). Upon reflection and following other qualitative researchers for whom it is standard practice to talk about "lived experiences" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018), it is my belief that taking the social constructionist position for this research is appropriate as it grants the opportunity to investigate, using interviews as active dialogue, the identity and sense of belonging of the Malaysian diaspora through their lived experiences in the United Kingdom.

Employing a qualitative approach allows the exploration of how and why a phenomenon occurs through a person's experience and narrative. The main categories of perspectives in the constructionist worldview encompass "symbolic interactionism, dramaturgy, phenomenology, […] ethnomethodology" (Leavy, 2017: 13) and "grounded theory" (Boccagni & Schrooten in Zapata-Barrero & Yalaz, 2018: 211). Thus, the most satisfactory perspective for this research was phenomenology. Dillon in *Introduction to Sociological Theory: Theorists, Concepts, and Their Applicability to the Twenty-First Century,* states that phenomenology:

> […] focuses on the significance of everyday reality and everyday experiences on how individuals construct knowledge of their social world, […] recognize and make sense of the experiences […] and the implications of such knowledge. (2020: 282)

This perspective allows me to investigate how people experience the topic under study while also having a degree of insider input during the research process and through the chosen theoretical frameworks. Furthermore, data collection through semi-structured interviews allowed for a comprehensive exploration of the phenomenon under study. Several qualitative approaches were used as methodologies for data collection in this research project. Denzin and Lincoln (2018) postulated that in order to understand the elusive nature of the ongoing human experience, one single method is inadequate. This was evident when trying to recruit participants for this research as, while some were open to audio interviews, others preferred

answering written interviews (see 1.5.2). Thus, a hybrid approach was used to accommodate different preferences. A total of 93 participant narratives were gathered, encompassing a diverse ethnic representation and offering valuable insights for the research.

1. Semi-structured in-depth one-to-one interviews: 59 participants
2. Written interview via Google Docs Form: 23 participants
3. Written interview via e-mail: 11 participants

Semi-structured one-to-one interviews

As postulated by Brinkmann, interviewing is among the most common methods of generating knowledge in the human and social sciences (in Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). The main approach of semi-structured in-depth one-to-one interviews was based on an open-ended set of questions that had been prepared beforehand. Although this set of questions only served as a guiding tool, it provided a conversational structure that was adaptable for the researcher as well as the participants to explore and deviate from other questions/responses. Brinkmann believes that "there is no such thing as a completely unstructured interview, since the interviewer will have an idea about what should take place in the conversation" (in Denzin & Lincoln, 2018: 1001). As such, the interview begins with broad general questions, followed by a host of more related and detailed questions on deep-seated issues where there is room to expand into further in-depth discussions (see appendix). Selecting this approach encouraged a smooth-flowing, relaxed and relatively spontaneous discussion, enabling me to explore more deeply into each participant's thoughts, ideas, feelings and beliefs on general issues and/or about a particular topic with more willingness on their part than a question-answer format. At that level, this type of interview allows the researcher to delve profoundly into personal and somewhat complex issues, intending to elicit views, opinions and transparency from the participants. The art of inquiry is an important aspect of any interview, as when duly and respectfully carried out, participants can share novel information that could bring diverging, unanticipated and subjective views to light. Through communicative interviews, important analytical details can be obtained, particularly when "emotional and experiential issues meet historical and political ones", divulging "some of the complexities of modern societies" (Brinkmann in Denzin & Lincoln, 2018: 998).

Written interviews via Google Docs Form & E-mail

Two types of formats of written interviews were used to tackle issues of time, accessibility, and the preference of some participants. The original set of questions, crafted for audio interviews, was adapted for written dissemination through two digital platforms: email (via Yahoo) and an online survey tool (Google Docs Form). Despite the inherently open-ended nature of these questions, their uniform presentation across participants might impart a structured appearance. Consequently, participants were explicitly invited to elaborate extensively on their personal experiences in their responses. Recognising the potential need for clarity or additional depth, it was essential to reserve the option to recontact participants for follow-up inquiries, contingent upon the initial analysis of their responses.

The written interview approach offers distinct advantages and constraints. One of its primary strengths lies in facilitating participation from individuals across diverse geographical locations, affording them the time and space needed for thoughtful reflection in their responses. This format may also appeal to those who prefer the privacy of written communication, especially when addressing questions of a sensitive nature. The convenience of this approach is noteworthy; it enables the distribution of the interview to a broad audience that meets the selection criteria, particularly when audio interviews may not be practical for some participants. Additionally, written interviews offer a logistical benefit by significantly reducing the researcher's transcription workload, as responses are received in a typed format, ready for analysis. This efficiency streamlines the data collection process, allowing for a more direct transition to data analysis.

However, this methodology is not without its limitations. A significant drawback is the inability to spontaneously probe participants for further clarification, potentially leading to ambiguities or misinterpretations that cannot be immediately addressed by the researcher. Additionally, written interviews do not allow for the capture of physical cues, verbal nuances, or emotional expressions, which can often enrich the understanding of responses; instead, the researcher must rely entirely on the participants' ability to convey their experiences descriptively in writing. Moreover, there are instances where responses may be incomplete, necessitating follow-up by the researcher to solicit additional information or clarification, if feasible. Despite these challenges, written interviews have proven to be a valuable tool in generating diverse and in-depth data.

1.5.2. Participant recruitment and interview setting

The collection of empirical data took place primarily between 2020 and 2021, amidst the COVID-19 pandemic when international travel faced numerous restrictions, with additional data gathering extending into 2023. Alternative forms of carrying out interviews therefore had to be considered, resulting in audio interviews being conducted via social media: WhatsApp Video/Voice call, Microsoft Teams and Facebook Messenger. This shift to online research not only proved to be cost-effective but also enhanced my academic independence as a junior researcher and the sole individual working on this project. These virtual platforms were easily and readily available, thereby ensuring that participants had installed at least one of these applications on their mobile devices, and showed ease and familiarity with online communication following their transnational communications. Moreover, communication with the participants was made easy when it came to scheduling interviews, allowing flexibility and modification in real time. Not only has the pandemic placed the world in a new context where health risks are to be taken into consideration, it has also encouraged the reformulation of strategies and ways of conducting online research.

I considered setting up focus group sessions for this research , which might have allowed participants to share their ideas, perspectives, and confirm insights through enriched interaction with each other However, this approach would have proved disadvantageous as it could have influenced their true feelings and views while in the presence of others, as well as risked a reduced or disproportionate average speaking time of each participant (Leavy, 2017). In order to encourage an honest and overt conversation, one-to-one interviews were better suited as the self-image of participants in comparison with others was not in jeopardy. Probing and following up on participants' responses were part of the process when more details were required to elaborate on their responses, and having no time constraints was an added advantage. Thus, in my opinion, adopting this approach was best suited for this research as it allowed me to gather specific experiences and opinions for in-depth exploration, where participants could feel free to confide in me without bias or judgment.

Participant recruitment procedure

My initial focus was London, as it is where the Malaysian population, like others, is mostly concentrated. However, after I posted several advertisements, many Malaysians reached out to me from various other parts of the United Kingdom for the purpose of this research. It quickly became clear to me that the geographical radius for my research would now need to

expand to other parts of the United Kingdom. Having a wide range of participants offered me the opportunity to narrate their differentiated and subjective lived experiences on matters such as migration, identity, sense of belonging, racial discrimination, and social class variation in contemporary life, providing me with rich and diverse data to analyse, and enabling me to take into account possible regional differences.

For the recruitment of participants, I initially sent messages via e-mail to several British associations, including the British Malaysian Society and the British Malaysian Chamber of Commerce, but was unsuccessful as my requests received no reply. Eventually, I searched for other means of reaching out to Malaysians. I then turned to my sister to obtain initial assistance with the recruitment process. She has lived in London for more than 25 years, and her assistance was needed in order to contact several Malaysian groups on Facebook and WhatsApp, as some of these groups are exclusively reserved for Malaysians living in the United Kingdom: Malaysians in the UK (9.3K members) and Malaysian Mummies in the UK (3.1K members)[3]. There were some groups on Facebook that I was eligible to join at the start of the recruitment: Malaysian Food in the United Kingdom (36K members), Malaysian Food in France (1K members), Malaysians in North West England (17 members), Malaysians in Scotland (451 members), Malaysians living in London 70s-80s (219 members), Global Malaysian Network (26K members), Malaysians in UK (5.3K members), Malaysian in France (1.7K members), GMN United Kingdom (866 members), Malaysians living in Europe (1.4K members) and Scotland (5.4K members).[4] In due course, my request to join Malaysians in the UK was accepted after I explained the purpose of my request.

Aware that not every contact would be keen to get involved in my research, particularly when the research is for academic purposes and offers no incentives, I was pleasantly surprised by the positive and quick responses I received from posting advertisements on social media. I designed an advertisement (refer to advertisement in Appendix 2) seeking voluntary and anonymous participants for a research study about Malaysians living in the United Kingdom who are in a legal immigration situation and who have been living in the United Kingdom for more than 2 years (refer to participant recruitment criteria below). I insisted on these criteria as, firstly, I wanted to eliminate any legal implications in terms of their immigration situation in the eyes of the law; and secondly, I assumed these participants would have gained an

[3] Latest Facebook update on 08/04/2022.
[4] Latest Facebook update on 08/04/2022.

adequate amount of experience and bond with their current location. I proceeded by posting the advertisement on my Facebook page and Instagram, followed by gradual posting on Malaysian groups on Facebook. The advertisement was also shared by family and friends on their Facebook pages, WhatsApp groups, Instagram, and personal contacts. This process created a snowball effect which caused the number of participants to proliferate, thanks to the help of participants suggesting to their personal contacts that they take part in this research (Leavy, 2017).

To ensure ethnic diversity in the recruitment of participants, I kept track of the sample population by creating a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet containing the details of each participant. As the interviews proceeded, I filtered the participants and reshaped the recruitment criteria following patterns, themes and issues that emerged from the interviews. I began selecting subsequent participants with the postulation that their views and experiences would differ from previous participants. The more interviews I conducted, the more these conversations formed patterns that were either similar or contradictory, embodying diverse themes, experiences, and issues, which provided me with valuable insight into notions that had been unexplored or unasked, prompting further exploration in the research. To give an example: on the question of their sense of belonging, some of the participants felt more accepted and a greater sense of belonging in the host country as opposed to feeling 'unbelonged' to their birth country as a result of inequality and feelings of being treated as a second-class citizen. Such narratives, in my opinion, may only emerge through in-depth interviews, demonstrating that this approach is advantageous in obtaining notions and themes that otherwise may not have emerged prior to interviews.

At first, the participant target was between 20-30. However, as a result of snowballing by asking interviewees to suggest others who would be interested in participating in the research (Leavy, 2017), I managed to communicate with a total of 93 Malaysian immigrants in the United Kingdom (Appendix 3) – 73 from England, 8 from Scotland, 2 from Northern Ireland, and 10 who were unassigned. The participant demographics revealed a significant gender disparity, with 69 females, 19 males, and 5 unassigned gender participants responding. This notable difference in female versus male engagement prompts questions about the underlying reasons. Several potential reasons could explain the higher female response rate in this study. One significant factor might be that I, as the researcher of this project, am female; women participants may feel more comfortable and willing to engage in the study, perceiving a sense of shared gender identity or understanding. This perceived empathy or relatability could lead

to a greater sense of trust and openness, encouraging more women to participate. Additionally, the subject matter of the research or the platforms used for recruitment and data collection might inherently appeal more to women or be more accessible to them. In his book *Men Are from Mars, Women Are from Venus*, American author and psychologist John Gray observes:

> To feel better, women talk about past problems, future problems, potential problems, even problems that have no solutions. The more talk and exploration, the better they feel. This is the way women operate. To expect otherwise is to deny a woman her sense of self. (1992: 36)

Gray's observation aligns with the gender ratio observed in my study's participant pool, highlighting differences between female and male engagement. Social and cultural dynamics, including how men and women are socialised regarding participation in academic research, could also play a role. Acknowledging the gender bias in participation rates is important, yet it remains a secondary consideration within the broader context of the study's aims and objectives.

For the purpose of participant identification for this thesis, I created a code system to identify each person by assigning a letter and a number: E for England and S for Scotland, followed by a sequential number.

Participant recruitment criteria:

1. First-generation Malaysian immigrants who were born and raised in Malaysia before migrating to the United Kingdom; this may include skilled active or inactive workers (Tier 2), single/in a relationship/married, and parents.
2. A minimum of 2 years of residency in the United Kingdom[5] (ensuring participants would have accumulated a sufficient amount of experience and attachment to their current location).
3. In legal immigration situation, possibly considering Permanent Residence status (explained in 4.4.2), citizenship, and/or future migration (linked to degrees of bond to their birth country).

[5] "UN recommended definition of a long-term international migrant. That is someone who changes their country of usual residence for a period of at least a year, so that the country of destination effectively becomes the country of usual residence." Sturge, "Migration Statistics" *UK Parliament - House of Commons Library*, 2024: 11.

Ensuring the participants complete privacy, anonymity and consent was extremely important to me as certain topics or issues discussed during the course of our audio interview or written interview could be deemed unsettling or sensitive. While my own migration trajectory and identity as a fellow Malaysian facilitated participants' trust, affinity, and rapport, there were also limitations in the form of assumptions and relatable experiences (refer to section 1.5.4). To address these limitations, prompting the participants with additional questions for further explanation and clarification was a strategy that proved effective. It was equally important for me as a junior researcher to show genuine and keen interest in their narratives and experiences as a way of demonstrating "an ethic of honesty, integrity, and caring" (Leavy, 2017: 39).

Virtual audio interview setting

The questions for the interview were designed to probe into the participants' reflections and sentiments regarding migration, identity, identity, and sense of belonging, in order to understand and conceptualise complex narratives. As mentioned earlier, even though the audio interviews were based on a questionnaire that I designed to serve as a guiding tool, the interviews themselves were open, casual and flexible to facilitate free expression and reflections on topics related to the research (see Researcher–Participant relationship below). Thanks to these conversations, I received constructive feedback and ideas that led me to amend part of my introduction and questions for subsequent interviews, thus allowing for an evolving and adaptable method of research, but confirming my initial core questions. Thus, setting aside time for the adjustment of the design was important. During the COVID-19 pandemic, interviews were carried out in a selected place, virtually for this project, rather than a natural field setting (participants' current location) which proved beneficial for interviewing participants regardless of their geographical position. This interview setting can be considered ideal insofar as it gives access to the greatest number participants available (Leavy, 2017).

Once the advertisements were posted on social media, without much delay, I was contacted by several people who wanted to take part in the research voluntarily. I would then proceed by setting up a date and time most convenient for both parties and sending them the information sheet, which took the form of a virtual information sheet containing the purpose and details of my research, consent, and the format by which they preferred to be interviewed (audio or written). All contacts were willing to participate in the audio or written interview once they read and understood the research purpose, as they found the topic on identity and migration "interesting" and relevant to them. One of the challenges I encountered while

scheduling audio interviews was having to be available at any hour, even on weekends or holidays, which required cooperation and support from my family. It was vital to conduct interviews immediately after the first encounter so as not to lose the participants' interest or risk a change of mind.

According to Leavy, "interview methods use conversation as a learning tool [and] people are naturally conversational, [thus] interview methods draw on something people are accustomed to participating in, even if not typically in formal settings" (2017: 139). This statement is particularly true, as some participants were expressive and articulate, contributing to an assortment of perspectives and experiences, which sometimes resulted in interviews lasting longer than typical. Additionally, those who frequently express themselves are typically those who are well-educated, on top of being articulate and actively engaging in social or public discussions. In cases where participants were less communicative and perceptive, using probing questions, for example, "Could you tell me more?"; "Do you mind explaining further?" or "Care to elaborate?" was necessary in order to encourage them to speak and provide more information. Some questions were adapted in accordance with the flow of the interview, at times some questions brought about other questions during the interview process. Thanks to the nature of open-ended semi-structured in-depth interviews, fixed yes-no responses do not apply here, allowing participants the freedom to use language to detail their responses at length and to deviate in any direction related to the question (Leavy, 2017). At times, when some participants would continue to speak after the interview was concluded and recording had ended, I would type out their contributions on a Microsoft Word document and add it to the participant's folder as some points were pertinent to the research. To conclude the interview, I would thank the participant for their time and ask if they would agree to a follow-up interview to clarify certain points.

Written interviews

For participants who preferred written interviews, two types of formats were proposed: a written format via e-mail (Yahoo) and an online enquiry tool (Google Docs Form). As previously mentioned, (see 1.5.1), the written questionnaire was a transcription of the audio interview questions. For those who provided e-mail addresses, an e-mail questionnaire was sent, and participants could answer the questions in the form of a reply (see Appendix 2). For those who opted for the online enquiry tool (Google Docs Form), a link to the website was sent (see Appendix 2); after which they could key in their responses and click "send". Regular website verification was necessary to see if there were new entries.

Depending on the preferred degree of anonymity, some participants would disclose their experiences and views with minimal details. This might be due to fear of revealing too much about themselves, or fear of responding to questions they deemed sensitive. Interviews may also be subject to a social desirability bias, meaning that participants would tend to present a positive self-image to appear socially acceptable, indicating a gap between the participants' genuine self and their perceived self (Bergen & Labonté in *Qualitative Health Research*, 2020). On the other hand, unlike audio interviews, these two types of written interviews had no time limit and could contain well-thought out and precise responses to questions that require indicating time frames or detailing incidents.

Researcher–Participant relationship

In qualitative research, there are many aspects to take into account when conducting in-depth interviews with reference to participant recruitment, gaining trust, developing rapport, and power dominance, and it is essential to set expectations and boundaries for the relationship between researcher and participant (Leavy, 2017). The interactions between researcher and participant are developed in a way that the objectives of the interview are reached, and both parties feel valued and respected mutually (Leavy, 2017). The ability to keep an open mind and maintain inquisitiveness while being mindful and non-judgemental are hallmarks of qualitative research. This includes evolving into different positions during the process of the research, particularly, for this specific research by adopting a hybrid position (see 1.5.4). As a junior qualitative researcher conducting scientific in-depth interviews for the first time, I was initially daunted by this experience and had a plethora of questions: how can I get quality data without breaching the participant's private space? How much of my personal experience and space do I share? How much of my personal experience and space do I share? How do we engage in a conversation that might include emotional exchange and still protect each other against vulnerability or the activation of any negative experiences? Am I a good listener? To help address these concerns, reading existing literature offered me some guidelines, while bearing in mind the distinctive nature of this topic that warrants the researcher's discretion.

One of the many ways I tried to cultivate good relationships with the participants during interviews was by demonstrating a genuine and keen interest in their experiences and narratives. Showing care for my research project, as well as sharing my personal interest in the topic, helped further in nurturing each relationship. I also discovered that upon detecting possible unease or conflict with regard to the questions, I had to reformulate the questions to

be mindful of our interaction pattern and not place participants in a compromising or awkward situation. Acquiring aid during the initial recruitment stage from my sister, who lives in London, was beneficial as she was one of the participants: a Malaysian immigrant from this community, thus an insider. Furthermore, to reinforce the legitimisation of this research and myself as the researcher, I sent them a link to my professional profile on the university website (EMMA, Université Paul-Valéry Montpellier 3) which includes details of my Ph.D. scientific activities (thesis title and supervisor, conference papers, and publication), education level, and work experience, as well as links to my LinkedIn and These.fr profiles. I believe these were necessary steps to take in order to illustrate the credibility of my research project and prove sincerity and legitimacy on my part.

The quality of the data is contingent upon the relationship between the researcher and the participant. The interaction that occurs during qualitative interviews grants the participants an opportunity to become acquainted with the researcher and, by extension, encourages the participants to respond and share their information and experiences with ease. Before starting an interview with a participant, I made sure to have a 'pep talk' to help alleviate any anxiety and create a comfortable atmosphere. This process included revealing personal details from both sides. On my part, I had to be comfortable and open to sharing about myself, and "[a]n ethic of self-care" had to be considered by setting a perimeter around what I decide to share (Leavy, 2017: 145). Disclosing my Malaysian identity emerged as a reassuring factor that rendered them more comfortable and relaxed about sharing their experiences, opinions, memories, and knowledge, as there was a sense of camaraderie when conversing with me (Zapata-Barrero & Yalaz, 2018). Curiosity about my interest and motivation for this research on identity was one of the first questions the participants asked, alongside questions about what the outcome of this research might be able to yield and how this could help improve the understanding of the Malaysian community in the United Kingdom. I realised that as a result of this phase, a certain bond was created between both researcher and participant, "prompt[ing] a response" from the participants (Leavy, 2017: 145), which granted a valuable and profound narrative, while bearing in mind the "high ethical benchmark" this type of setting demands in terms of reflexivity and power dynamics (Zapata-Barrero & Yalaz, 2018: 173). Being an attentive listener was vital in assuring the participants that I cared about what they had to say and wanted to understand their point of view. In listening to their lived experiences with sensitivity, I developed a keen sense of empathy and compassion toward most participants, especially when they shared memories, trials, and tribulations. After the interview sessions,

using an interpretivist framework to decode their narratives, I had to thoroughly consider which information could be analysed and shared even though all the participants consented to sharing all the information provided.

Reflecting on my situation as a junior researcher for this research project, I acknowledge the privilege that has been granted to me by these participants who generously shared their personal narratives and guided me through their life paths. The gift of their time, effort, and wisdom to share their experiences with me has helped in achieving the purpose of this research. Reciprocity in trust and respect is essential for nurturing a positive researcher-participant relationship with the aim of collecting authentic quality data. Before parting ways at the end of each interview and thanking them for their time and their narrative, I explained what would come next as far as the content of the interview and our relationship were concerned. I asked for their permission to contact them if further clarification was needed, and suggested that they contact me if they had more information or experiences to share, or wanted to make a retraction. I concluded by informing them that I would give them an update when the thesis is completed, and eventually share with them the outcome of the thesis defence, as well as future projects concerning this field of study.

Interview approach preference

As a junior researcher for this thesis project, applying multiple approaches to gleaning empirical data to suit participant preference, it was clear to me that the one-to-one audio interview approach was my preferred choice for research and empirical data collection. Not only did this approach allow for the engagement of multiple voices to be heard, it also paved the way for flexibility with its elements of spontaneity and depth. These audio interviews made it possible for me to create a bond, as we were able to share thoughts and common interests. This phase took place mostly after the interview had occurred and only if time permitted. Much of the 'off-the-record' conversations were about childhood memories, food, travelling, and general life abroad. Most participants were interested and curious about my lived experience in France. As mentioned earlier, while this was a crucial part of building a sustainable and trustworthy relationship for authentic and quality data, I took precautions to be mindful not to overshare my thoughts and views. This was deliberately done not for the purpose of objectivity but so as not to influence their narratives by bringing up my own. Under such circumstances, our lived experiences were differentiated and polarised, so I took care to make room for the narration of their own stories.

Recognising the importance of getting the participants to warm up to me, and get into a comfortable state of mind, made the interview process easier for unfolding complex narratives. By informing them of the style of the interview, which was informal, the participant felt relaxed enough to answer honestly and openly, and as a consequence, generated insightful responses, particularly when questions on ethnicity, religion, and politics were deemed to be sensitive topics. I was initially surprised at how open the participants in my research were once they felt at ease sharing their experiences, reaffirming that my approach of having a 'pep talk' prior to the interview was indeed an invaluable step in getting people to talk. With the one-to-one audio semi-structured interviews, I learned that there was a greater opportunity not only to probe further with more questions for additional information that was worth exploring, but also to circle back to core questions/answers for a deeper understanding. I was able to detect and observe any variations in vocal tone—the unsaid—and choice of words—the said—during the conversation, which allowed me to analyse more deeply into their narrative. What is more, because I conducted one-to-one interviews as opposed to focus groups, there were no potential distractions, influence, or peer-pressure (see 1.5.2 and 1.5.4 on social desirability) that could sometimes arise in such interview settings. The process of designing, re-designing, and ameliorating for a project is a reiterative practice that I believe is fundamental in aggregating high-quality data. This research project has benefited from such practice through the one-to-one interview approach where I was able to adapt and explore questions/answers for a more comprehensive interview experience.

1.5.3. Data collection, audio transcriptions and research ethics

Data collection

There were multiple sources for the collection of data for this thesis research, drawing from a variety of sources to construct a comprehensive narrative. At the forefront, the primary data emanated from 93 voluntary semi-structured in-depth one-to-one audio and written interviews. These interviews served as a pivotal foundation, enabling the inductive construction of broader themes, categories, and patterns directly from the data (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). This bottom-up approach facilitated the organisation of data into categorical themes in the subsequent stages of the thesis. As the analysis progressed, themes and patterns began to emerge distinctly, guiding a deductive phase where I revisited the data to ascertain the necessity for additional information to bolster the analysis. This phase was complemented by observations drawn from my peer-reviewed scientific article published in 2023, illuminating some of the reasons and strategies ethnic minority Malaysians employ to secure better career and life chances in the United Kingdom. This dual approach, leveraging both inductive and deductive methodologies, paved the way to unravel motivations, experiences, and adaptations that foreground migration, integration, and identity formation among first-generation Malaysian immigrants in the United Kingdom. The comprehensive examination of primary sources, including the invaluable personal narratives collected through interviews and the scholarly insights from my published work, collectively illuminated individual aspirations and the broader sociocultural and economic contexts.

Other primary sources of data focused on Malaysian migration to the United Kingdom, with emphasis on the search for improved economic conditions and educational opportunities, as highlighted in *The Malaysian Economy in Figures 2019* and the *World Bank's Malaysia Economic Monitor*. These sources document a migration trend motivated by better livelihoods and educational ambitions, further supported by data from the Ministry of Higher Education and the *Malaysia Education Blueprint 2015-2025*. Professional growth, especially in healthcare as identified by Briggs (2019), is also a key driver. Theories by Stuart Hall and Homi Bhabha provide perspectives on the integration and identity negotiation processes, emphasising the role of cultural hybridity and language proficiency, crucial for socioeconomic integration as noted by Fernández-Reino (2019). Immigrants' sense of belonging is shaped by legal and socioeconomic factors, including immigration laws and policies in both Malaysia and Britain, affecting their identity and community connections. Ratnam (2019) stresses the importance of community for belonging in a multicultural Britain. Statistical data and policy analysis from

both countries contextualise these migration experiences, supplying extensive enlightenment regarding the demographic characteristics of Malaysian immigrants and the broader migration framework.

This thesis leverages a vast array of secondary scientific literature, including books, journals, theses, and newspapers, to provide a nuanced analysis across diverse fields such as British history, diaspora, education, identity, Malaysian studies, and migration, among others. These sources have been crucial in understanding the complexities of migration, integration, identity formation, and the impact of educational policies on ethnic citizenship. Key historical findings from Colley (1994) and Darwin (2012) help trace the British Empire's evolution and its global influence, while works by Appadurai (1996) and others explore the cultural dimensions of globalisation. The study also examines Malaysia's political economy, the role of language policy, migration and immigration, drawing from authors like Andaya & Andaya (1982) and Benson & O'Reilly (2016). Discussions on multiculturalism and race, supported by Anderson (1983), Althusser (1971), Hirsch (2018) and Eddo-Lodge (2018), alongside methodological perspectives from Creswell & Creswell (2018), enrich the thesis. Sociological theories from Giddens & Sutton (2021) provide a foundation for analysing social interactions and societal structures. Altogether, these diverse scholarly contributions significantly enhance the thesis, offering a comprehensive view of global and local contexts affecting migration and societal change.

Data saturation

One of the challenges faced during data collection via qualitative interviews was data saturation. While there is no specific answer to the question of the number of participants necessary to ensure adequate qualitative data collection, a practical approach is to end data collection—in this case, terminate qualitative interviews—when it reaches a saturation point (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Zapata-Barrero & Yalaz, 2018). For this research, data saturation came in the form of repetitive themes, issues, and experiences where gathering additional data no longer sparked new insights or patterns (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Leavy, 2017). Research data should provide valuable and novel learning, but when data becomes saturated, there is a risk of redundancy or "chain sampling" (Leavy, 2017: 78, 80).

This research accumulated 93 participant narratives from London and Greater London and various major cities in the United Kingdom, as well as from various ethnic backgrounds and experiences, allowing for rich and significant analysis. As the interviews proceeded,

themes began to emerge which in due course were clearly identified as recurring themes. To avoid recurring themes from becoming repetitive themes, I decided to cease recruiting more participants. Although "size is not the most relevant predictor for the quality of the research and findings" (Zapata-Barrero & Yalaz, 2018: 158), based on the number of interviews I conducted, I estimated that they offered sufficient relevant data, enabling me to carry out my research satisfactorily and thus contribute to the development of my analysis.

Audio transcriptions

Each audio interview was recorded, with prior consent from the participants, using *Audacity*, an audio recording application installed on my computer. Participant verbal consent was mandatory and recorded as proof of consent. Then, the audio interviews needed to be transcribed to transform voice recordings into a written format. This process used a student subscription to an online application called Otter.ai. The application helped to transcribe the audio files into an initial automated transcription, after which I manually edited each transcription to capture any Malaysian words or inaudible words/sentences that were unclear in the recording. Most participants code-switched during the interviews, interchanging between English, Malay, Tamil, Chinese dialects, or *Manglish* (Malaysian English).[6] Their choice of code-switching with me could be attributed to their belief that because I am Malaysian, I would presumably be able to comprehend and decode the colloquial language spoken, *Manglish*. For this reason, the transcripts bear some colloquial words and standard English grammatical inaccuracies insofar as they preserve the narratives' original character.

The advantage of recording interviews is that it allows for re-listening as many times as necessary to eliminate any discrepancies between the voice recordings and the transcriptions, including during data analysis. This phase was laborious and time-consuming but vital for data analysis, and it is up to the researcher to decide the necessity of transcribing the interviews fully or partially, based on what is deemed highly pertinent to the research (Zapata-Barrero & Yalaz, 2018). Although the interviews were meticulously transcribed to ensure no information was missed, only the most pertinent data was incorporated into the thesis. Some of this information underwent editing to align with the thesis's writing style and grammatical

[6] "At the more colloquial range of Malaysian English, transfer includes not only borrowing but also code mixing and switching as bilingual and multilingual speakers and writers use them to portray informality, familiarity, rapport, humour, and again ethnic identity. […] code mixing is the most natural way of using and choosing between languages and felt it to be a most direct expression of their personalities. […] Malaysian English has an identity of its own and the many deviations in the lexical aspects make it a distinct variety of English." Yunus, "The Many Faces of Malaysian English" *International Scholarly Research Network*, 2012: 7-12.

standards. This phase allowed me to draw information, highlight relevant and important points from the transcripts, and eventually pose participant follow-up questions or clarifications on certain points. Furthermore, the process of recording and transcribing audio interviews also enhances the storage and archiving of data.

Research Ethics

A research plan, together with an ethics form, was established and submitted to the Institutional Review Board (IRB) committee at the Université Paul-Valéry Montpellier 3 for consideration and approval (see appendix). The process requires the committee to review potential risks that the human participants could be exposed to and to ensure that the researcher abides by the terms of the application in protecting the rights of human participants (Creswell, & Creswell, 2018). Several ethical elements were observed during the course of the interview process: IRB approval, informed consent, rights to amend or retract from research participation, the right to skip questions deemed sensitive, anonymity, and data usage solely for academic purposes. Securing and keeping safe all the data procured from the interviews as well as guaranteeing privacy and confidentiality, were standard procedures in obtaining the IRB approval. I introduced myself to the participants as the sole researcher for this thesis project, providing them with all the necessary information to gain trust. They were informed about the research and its use for academic purposes, and how the data would be applied. Prior to the audio interview recordings, the participants were asked if they had any questions or concerns about the research and to confirm that they understood the research. After this, they were asked for their consent and permission to be recorded. Verbal consent was then recorded after recording started, while written interviews bore written consents. Once the audio interviews were recorded, they underwent transcription and direct quotes were anonymised.

While it is crucial to apply high ethical standards when conducting qualitative research and securing anonymity and confidentiality, researchers should establish trust and rapport by being understanding and empathetic towards participants, particularly when using open-ended interviews in relaxed and casual settings (Zapata-Barrero & Yalaz, 2018). It is important to make participants feel comfortable and encouraged to speak without constraints about their lived experiences, but also free to refuse to answer questions that they do not wish to discuss (Zapata-Barrero & Yalaz, 2018). In this dimension, there is power on both sides: the power to control the interview to a certain extent via questioning as an interviewer; and the power to decide which questions to answer or not as an interviewee. The hallmark of empirical research such as the present study is to produce scientific data/literature about a population that is under-

researched. Gathering data from narratives that reflect upon the complex lives of Malaysian immigrants in the United Kingdom creates an avenue for well-informed and well-researched discussions and debates, and contributes to existing scholarship.

1.5.4. Reflexivity, personal positionality and limitations

As a researcher in the broad field of British studies focusing on the Malaysian diaspora and incorporating areas of sociology/cultural/postcolonial/diaspora studies, my role and reflexivity in relation to this research project are important elements to discuss. As hypothesised by Denzin and Lincoln,

> [T]he personal biography of the researcher, who speaks from a particular class, gendered, racial, cultural and ethnic community perspective [and is] situated […] from within a distinct interpretive community, [c]onfigures, in its special way, the multicultural, gendered components of the research act. Behind and within […] major paradigms and interpretive perspectives, research strategies, methods of collecting and analyzing empirical materials, and the art of interpretation […] stands the biographically situated researcher, […] constituting a distinct point of view, […] lead[ing] the researcher to adopt particular views of the "other" who is studied. (2018: 52)

It is therefore essential to reflect on the direction of the research and how data could potentially be shaped and interpreted based on my background, culture and experiences as the researcher for this thesis project (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

I am a Malaysian living in France, and questions on the subject of migration, identity and sense of belonging at this point in my life arose while taking steps to formalise my integration and citizenship in France, as well as evaluating my own Malaysian nationality. Profound reflections began during the course of Year 2 of my MA in English Studies at the Université Paul-Valéry Montpellier 3 (UPVM) in 2017, where I learned about Britishness, national identity, and migration policies, as well as theories on identity, integration and sense of belonging. This academic journey sparked and formed my initial interest in this field of study—what it means to be a Malaysian immigrant living in a host country. The UPVM helped equip me with the necessary skills and, through my thesis supervisor, gave me the encouragement to continue my research journey, and to fine-tune my research project at a Ph.D. level. As such, it was imperative to first establish my position as the researcher for this project.

At the start of this research, I assumed my position was solely as an insider, given the research field was familiar and close to my migratory experience. However, during the interview proceedings with these participants, this assumption immediately made me realise that my position was indiscernible. On the one hand, I was exploring a group of people with

multi-ethnic, multicultural and multilingual backgrounds who encompass a multitude of social practices, such as myself. On the other hand, the researched group lived in the United Kingdom, whereas I lived in France, which resulted in differing experiences. Thus, I had difficulties in trying to best describe my position in the research as my researcher identity was multifaceted and subject to negotiation. It was equally important to critically assess my position as a Malaysian immigrant researcher, sharing common points based on having similar migratory experiences, nationality, culture, and language. In contrast, I was exploring another community living in the United Kingdom, which was conducive to experiences, cultures, and practices that were dissimilar from mine in France. Having my own experiences as a Malaysian immigrant perhaps places me in a binary, reflexive perspective of both an insider and an outsider. The terms "insider" and "outsider" are often distinguished in qualitative research (Carling *et al.* 2014; Chereni 2014; Ryan 2015; Song & Parker 1995 in Zapata-Barrero & Yalaz, 2018). In agreement with these scholars, I believe that the dichotomy between insider and outsider is too inflexible and almost anachronistic in categorising a qualitative researcher in reference to fitting in or not fitting into the researched culture. Alternatively, it may be worth considering the researcher's experience and background and how these elements may impact the researcher-participant relationship, and thus the interview's outcome. Moreover, there may even be ambiguity and a reluctance to share certain views/experiences on the part of the participant, and/or some participants may or may not see eye to eye with the researcher in terms of knowledge and experiences.

As the interviews proceeded, I found my position ambivalent: at times more outsider than insider; or vice versa, depending on the discussion. As mentioned before, although my own migration trajectory is to France and not the United Kingdom, some participants consider me an insider with insider knowledge and assume that I comprehend certain views or issues relative to Malaysia. Sharing a common ground with the participants improves my navigation and understanding of their lived experiences, even though some subjectivity may surface. Furthermore, in my view, knowledge of the complexities and social biases that are innate in Malaysian culture may only be fully grasped as an insider, as "it facilitates preventing perpetuation of racial and ethnic stereotypes" (Few, 2007 in Denzin & Lincoln, 2018: 277). As established earlier, the participants were more receptive during interviews, particularly when the interviewer was a Malaysian and a junior Ph.D. researcher/candidate in need of help with the research. Thus, they may be less likely to try to make an impression and more likely to be honest in their answers. My position as an immigrant also provides room for sharing

experiences, mitigating any distance between the researcher and the researched participants and reinforcing the validity of this research.

My position as an outsider stems from the fact that some of my experiences are different from those of the participants in the United Kingdom. We have slightly diverged migratory processes and strategies. This is reflected in a number of participants' tendency to explain in detail British laws and policies, how things function, or how they feel about certain things in their current location, with the assumption that I lack the information and knowledge. A non-Malaysian/non-immigrant outsider may not have the capacity to understand the complexities of Malaysian immigrants, and interviews may not yield honest answers due to social desirability (see 1.5.2) and the need to impress the interviewer to showcase the Malaysian population, which is a minority, underrepresented and often misunderstood. My outsider perspective can be objective in obtaining facts and data, "[…] in a new space/online where subjects talk back, interact with us, read our research, and criticize our work, all while eroding the walls we build around ourselves as objective outsiders studying the virtual worlds of others" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018: 904)—situating me as an insider-outsider. Going beyond the typical insider-outsider polarity, Carling *et al*. in *Beyond the insider–outsider divide in migration research* proposes five multidimensional approaches to research positionality: "explicit third party, honorary insider, insider by proxy, hybrid insider-outsider, and apparent insider" (2014: 1), encompassing characteristics and identity markers managed and utilised in a research interview setting (Zapata-Barrero & Yalaz, 2018). While I attempted to align myself with one of the proposed researcher positionalities—specifically, the "hybrid insider-outsider", where researchers share traits with both the migrant group being studied and the host country's majority population, or the "insider by proxy", which applies to immigrant researchers from a different migrant background than their subjects (Carling *et al*., 2014: 50-51)—I encountered a challenge. My situation did not neatly fit into either category, as both are predicated on the assumption that the researcher and the researched group are located within the same country. Instead, my specific insider-outsider status unveiled a continuum of fluidity, nuance and novelty.

Ryan in *"Inside" and "Outside" of What or Where? Researching Migration Through Multi-Positionalities* postulates that "[…] interview processes should be understood in terms of the dynamic rhythms of multi-positionalities, […] enabl[ing] researchers to be reflexive about the instability and contingency of empathy, understanding and rapport, and how these need to be continually negotiated across layers of power differentials" (2015: 2). Ryan suggests

a flexible and accommodating position for the qualitative researcher as opposed to a rigid insider-outsider status. In the course of this research, it was crucial for me to acknowledge the nuanced and shifting limitations of being neither a complete insider nor an outsider. On the one hand, I was able to appreciate the common knowledge and experiences shared as an immigrant with the participants from an insider perspective; and on the other hand, I was able to embrace an outsider perspective with the ability to reposition myself and ask questions about their background, lived experiences, sense of belonging, and identity in the United Kingdom. My own identity as a Malaysian immigrant in France, speaking French in addition to English, Malay and Tamil, and experiencing a French lived experience, distinguished me from the participants who were Malaysian immigrants in the United Kingdom and who differed in terms of speaking English and other languages, and experiencing British lived experiences. After much contemplation about our paralleled lives and contention between "multi-positionalities", "insider by proxy" and "hybrid insider-outsider", I identified *contiguous-insider* as the best possible term to categorise my unique position.

While my positionality may raise the question of whether researchers can ever be truly objective when conducting research, the answer may lie in the understanding that researchers are human beings with emotions, life experiences, personal views, and assumptions that can influence how they feel, see, reflect, and interpret matters. Objectivity, particularly in qualitative research, is inherently challenging as it involves navigating personal biases while striving to faithfully represent the perspectives of participants. Researchers must acknowledge that their backgrounds and positionalities can shape both the framing of research questions and the interpretation of findings, underscoring the difficulty of achieving complete neutrality. That said, while researchers may not achieve absolute objectivity, they should cultivate self-awareness and endeavour to remain impartial throughout the research process. This requires recognising one's biases and taking deliberate steps to minimise their impact on data collection, analysis, and interpretation. This has been my experience throughout the research process, as I have had to continually remind myself to maintain impartiality and a non-judgemental perspective so as not to inadvertently influence the views or narratives of the participants.

At the same time, building trust and rapport with participants necessitated an empathetic and sensitive approach to what was shared, which can sometimes blur the boundary between objective analysis and human connection. The challenge lies in finding balance—remaining engaged and empathetic without compromising the rigour or integrity of the research. Staying focused on the overarching objective of this research, which is to contribute meaningfully to

scholarship in this field, has been a crucial anchor. As a contiguous insider, I have had to navigate the complex interaction between familiarity with certain aspects of the research context and the need for critical distance. This dynamic has required careful negotiation of the dichotomies between insider, outsider, and the in-between. Carling *et al*. argue that "hybrid positions can contribute to striking a balance between proximity and distance in the informant–researcher relation" (2014: 51). While hybrid positionality can provide unique insights, it also presents limitations, as it demands constant reflection and vigilance to avoid over-identification or the projection of personal assumptions onto the research. It is a delicate equilibrium requiring awareness of the potential for subjectivity while utilising insider knowledge to enrich the analysis. It is with hope and optimistic intent that these elements will contribute to a rich, valuable, and unique analysis for this thesis project. By embracing the complexities and challenges of subjectivity, and committing to reflexivity throughout the research process, I aim to ensure that this work contributes to the scholarship in a way that is both insightful and methodologically robust, while acknowledging the inherent tensions in striving for objectivity in qualitative research.

1.5.5. Data analysis methodology and theme classification

Data analysis methodology

In this section, I discuss how I approached the process of analysing the collected data. Prior to data analysis, I made sure to review each narrative using the line-by-line approach to thematic analysis, acquainting myself painstakingly with the data, recalling keywords or phrases from the narratives, and being open to multiple interpretations of the data. The data analysis and interpretation process are fundamental in transforming the data into "intelligible accounts" (Wolcott cited in Leavy, 2017: 150) as "the data do not speak for themselves. We have to speak for them" (Vogt *et al*. cited in Leavy, 2017: 150). As such, the process proposed by Leavy includes "data preparation and organization, initial immersion, coding, categorizing and theming, and interpretation" (2017: 150). Furthermore, other aspects that needed to be taken into account were my views, thoughts and understanding as a researcher in the process, where reflections on the data collection occurred continuously before, during and after the interviews. The data collection, analysis and interpretation can take place simultaneously, "leading to interpretation leading to analysis, and so forth" (Leavy, 2017: 150).

The data preparation phase involved the transcription of each participant's recorded narrative, as well as side notes of vocal tones and other details during the interview. I have detailed this phase in section 1.5.3. Following online-assisted and manual transcriptions, I reviewed the transcripts meticulously during a second reading, highlighting observations using my own colour-coding system to identify important and relevant words and phrases and allow for initial and provisional themes and concepts. Organising the data into a coding system led me to refine and revise themes pertinent to the research, while concurrently eliminating codes that were deemed redundant and irrelevant at this stage. Analysing qualitative data is time-consuming, and it takes longer for me as the researcher to analyse than quantitative data, as interview answers need to be read thoroughly, after which important points need to be categorised by coding. To facilitate the analysis of such a large database, the use of a qualitative data analysis software called NVIVO helped enhance my management, organisation, and analytical process of the multiple data sources and formats: audio interview transcripts, e-mail questionnaires, and online questionnaires, efficiently (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). This software also helped me to navigate and locate specific or recurring words or data fragments quickly, as opposed to manually opening several Microsoft Word documents simultaneously and managing these documents inefficiently. Furthermore, the utility of this software allowed

additional time for deep analysis of the data and enabled me to detect elements of similarity and difference within the aggregated narratives, as well as incongruities. Additional reading of narratives and notes was carried out to compile distinctly illuminating quotes from the interviews. In order to have some guidance, a sense of direction, credibility and validation, I shared some of the initial findings, reflections and themes derived from data collection and analysis at multiple stages with my thesis supervisor for feedback which helped determine whether I was on the right track.

Storing the data securely with backup files was a necessary and crucial step in ensuring good organisation and data protection as "qualitative research produces a wealth of data" (Leavy, 2017: 150), and thus can be rather substantial and overwhelming. As such, sorting the data and dividing it into what Saldana calls "chunks" of data was valuable for clarity and ease of search (Saldana in Leavy, 2017: 150). This came in the form of several separate subfolders containing audio/Google Docs/e-mail interviews, transcripts, and a Microsoft Excel file containing details of each participant within a main folder. Another software package that I found particularly useful in managing multiple datasets and notes, as well as gathering my views/thoughts, was Microsoft OneNote. This software helped me organise my notes through pages and sections, while navigating with ease to find information. It also allowed for the addition or revision of notes without having to hit the 'save' button, as it was done automatically. As someone who is visually inclined, I used digital highlighters and made annotations using a colour-coding system.

Having such digital tools for the management and organisation of data, it is hoped that the "micro exchanges" that I had through interviews will flourish into "macro-oriented interpretations" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018: 998). In effect, as I studied each narrative meticulously for a thematic analysis, I encountered certain similarities in most of them, which provided further confirmation of the synthesis of themes, sub-themes, and redundant themes, resulting in the identification of several prominent themes among the participants. I observed their sense of identity and belonging as a construct that is significant to their reasons for migration. By incorporating an interpretive phenomenological framework into the analysis of the identity transformation of the participants, I was attentive and made a conscious effort to preserve their narratives expressed in their own words as much as possible during the interpretation process. Phenomenology, as a philosophical approach, seeks to explore and interpret the socially constructed realities of how people experience, construct and understand

certain phenomena; by taking into account thoughts, feelings and opinions, the researcher may be able to unpack the essence and truth of those phenomena (Hackley, 2003).

I found this method appropriate and responsive to the exploration of the personal sense of identity and to gaining a better understanding of how participants developed their sociocultural identity and sense of belonging in the host country. In a chapter from *The Good Immigrant* (2016) Eddo-Lodge, a British journalist and author states "[t]o be an immigrant, good or bad, is about straddling two homes, whilst knowing you don't really belong to either" (2016: 83). This statement echoes profoundly with the research participants' narratives, as the issue of integration—belonging neither here, nor there—is an important aspect of the immigrant experience phenomenon, as they straddle between homes: Malaysia and the United Kingdom. As established in section 1.5.4, because I had taken a form of *emic* and *etic* position as the researcher of this project, that is to say, a contiguous-insider, I was able to understand views of sociocultural life premised on the participants' own terms and perspectives. This proved to be advantageous as the researcher was also the interviewer, which encouraged further familiarisation with the participants' narratives and allowed for analysis based upon observations made during the course of the interviews. Through the in-depth interviews, the participants' narratives were central and well-grounded in descriptions of their experiences and processes of identity and sense of belonging throughout the research process, granting the exploration of the likelihood of participants embracing a plural/multiple cultural identity—a culturally hybrid identity.

During the review phase, not only were themes identified and clustered together with the objective of addressing the research questions, but other themes also emerged during this phase that were unanticipated, and these were documented as part of the findings. While pondering my own decision to migrate, I tried to comprehend the participants' migratory experience through their perspectives, and through thematic analysis, I questioned the various phenomena to arrive at potential interpretations. One recurring and thus vital theme was migrating to a new country with premeditation and a plan. Utilising NVIVO enabled me to locate participants' narratives regarding their migration choices and the various trajectories many of them selected. Below is an example of a sentence cluster coding from an interview transcript and my interpretation:

Sentence cluster in interview	Interpretation of sentence cluster
E65: mainly due to my father's influence, who had previously studied and worked in the UK in the 70s.; high regards for the quality of education in UK universities; keen for us (my brothers and I) to be educated here; I decided to stay on for work after graduation, better salary and lifestyle. E28: came here to study, bachelor's degree, Master's; didn't want to go back just yet; found myself a job; employers sponsored … work permit; been here for 25 years.	Migration was premeditated and planned: anticipated. Aftermath of migration: unanticipated. Economic migration.

What is deduced in this sentence cluster is the decision to leave the birth country for education, which was premeditated and planned, however, remaining in the host country for work seemed inadvertent and unplanned. Although the plan to move abroad for education was anticipated mainly by the parents, the decision to not "go back just yet" and later "stay on for work" as part of the migration process was a decision made by the child/participant that only occurred after graduation, and is thus considered an unanticipated phenomenon. Migration then is identified as a theme and, by extension, an avenue for interpreting reasons for moving and decisions for remaining/migration which are derived from the sentence cluster and coding.

In phenomenology, unpacking social and cultural meanings embedded within narratives entails both the researcher and the participant engaging in dialogue in order to uncover "people's realities […] influenced by the world [where] the researcher needs to understand that experiences are linked to social, cultural and political contexts" (Flood in Tuohy *et al*., 2013: 19), that is to say, the lived experiences in everyday circumstances of Malaysian immigrants in the United Kingdom. The exploration of the participants' lived experiences was approached at certain points in time which correspond to the spaces in which the participants construct and transform their identities and sense of belonging. Van Manen postulated that there are:

> [F]our fundamental life-world 'existential themes' that enable phenomenologists to reflect on how people experience the world [where] people's previous experiences can and do influence present and future

> experiences: […] 'lived space', 'lived time', 'lived body' and 'lived human relation'. Mackey (2005) stated that 'lived space' grounds the person in a location, van Manen (1990) referred to 'lived space' as 'felt space', and said that the space in which we are located […] affects us. 'Lived time' refers to subjective time, as opposed to objective, clock time (van Manen 1990). Lived time can seem to speed up when we are busy or enjoying ourselves or slow down and even drag when we are bored or waiting for something. Understanding can only be achieved if grounded in time (Mackey 2005). (in Tuohy *et al*., 2013: 19)

In this line of thought, the participants' "lived space" is considered as "felt space" due to how the participants' felt about emigrating from Malaysia and migrating to the United Kingdom. The way in which they navigate their host country is explored through narratives as they ponder about and recount their past life in Malaysia and how they seek a brighter future and a meaningful quality of life. There is a temporal connection between the past, the present and the future as participants carry with them their past "lived space" memories, which may enhance or impede some of their integration processes. Another aspect included in this spectrum of temporality is the inherent ethnocultural values that transcend the geographical spaces of their birth country and affect their interactions in their new environment in the host country. Interpreting these narratives through a social constructionist lens within the phenomenological framework allows for a deeper and more accurate understanding of the subjective experiences and meanings that these participants ascribe to their migration journeys.

This focus on employing a social constructionist perspective within a phenomenological framework to interpret migration narratives naturally segues into a methodological choice that emphasises the depth and richness of individual stories. Choosing this focused methodology does not indicate a disinterest in broader comparative analyses, but rather a strategic decision to deeply explore the diverse stories told by interview participants. My research primarily concentrates on the Malaysian diaspora, yet I am prepared to explore comparisons with other ethnic groups within the immigrant community in the United Kingdom, and with other diasporic ethnic minorities when relevant. This in-depth qualitative approach aims to dissect the reciprocity between ethnicity, culture, and social integration within a specific diasporic context. Through such a detailed study, I seek to delve into the layers of personal and communal experiences, giving insight into the interlaced realities faced by diasporic communities. This research direction allows for a closer examination of often overlooked perspectives, thereby

enriching several pertinent fields of study. It is also a journey that challenges and expands my own understanding of these fields as a researcher. The tangible experiences of Malaysians in the United Kingdom serve as a valuable lens to explore the everyday realities of diasporic life, moving past general political discussions to reveal the personalised stories, cultural expressions, and social interactions that shape their lived experiences that contribute to the broader society.

Themes and results

For most participants, early life experiences in Malaysia served as a catalyst for their awareness of ethnic inequalities and the feeling of being relegated to a second-class citizen status. Each participant recognised the foundational role of their family's value system in shaping their perceptions of social justice and their position within societal structures. This backdrop of personal and collective experiences underpins the narratives shared in the research. The demographic makeup of the study's participants is notably diverse yet specific. Predominantly, they are ethnic minorities, with a significant representation from the Chinese-Malaysian community, reflecting both the ambitions of this group and their status as Malaysia's second-largest ethnic population. The next significant group is the Indian-Malaysian community, who are ethnic minorities and represent the third-largest ethnic population in Malaysia. Finally, the Malay-Malaysia and mixed-ethnic communities form the rest of these participants. These individuals seem to hail from middle-class backgrounds, suggesting that economic motives are a primary driver of their migration, seeking better opportunities and a higher quality of life abroad. Curiously, a majority of the participants are female, a factor that might mirror the researcher's gender. This resemblance could enhance the participants' openness, fostering a sense of empathy and understanding, and possibly making them more inclined to share their experiences. This gender dynamic highlights the gender-specific challenges and perspectives to this study. While it is not the central focus of the current research, it presents a valuable opportunity for future investigations to delve into these gender-related aspects more deeply. Furthermore, while some participants have children born in the United Kingdom, and their perspectives were briefly touched upon by the participants, this aspect was not analysed in depth as it falls outside the scope of this thesis. However, it also presents a promising avenue for future research exploring second-generation Malaysians in the United Kingdom.

The participants are characterised by their high level of education and skill, indicating that the migration decision was not just a flight from adverse conditions but a strategic move to leverage their qualifications in a more receptive and meritocratic environment. In the host country, the participants in my research seem to have achieved a range of middle-class to upper-class lifestyles, highlighting their successful economic integration and ability to thrive within a new cultural and economic context. Despite these economic successes, they encounter challenges in social integration, indicating a more complex adjustment process beyond economic stability and survivability. These narratives not only showcase the resilience, ambition, and strategic planning of the participants, who navigated the complexities of migration to carve out new opportunities for themselves and their families, but also set the stage for a deeper exploration of their lived experiences. The insights gathered from these journeys are meticulously organised into prominent themes, as detailed in parts 4 and 5 of the study. This thematic arrangement allows for a structured analysis of the key issues discussed, providing a clear outline for understanding the complex nature of migration as experienced by the participants.

Part 4 provides an in-depth exploration of the participants (the narrators) and their narratives, presenting a window into the complex motivations that propelled them from Malaysia to the United Kingdom. It meticulously examines the multiple reasons behind their decision to migrate, with a particular focus on the systemic ethnic prejudice and discrimination that permeates both the educational and employment sectors in Malaysia. These enduring issues not only limit opportunities for certain ethnic groups but also create an environment where potential and talent are often overlooked due to ethnic biases. The narrators' choice of the United Kingdom as their destination is examined through several lenses. Firstly, the allure of an English-speaking environment stands out as a significant factor, suggesting a preference for a linguistic landscape that promises broader communication possibilities and integration. Secondly, the historical connections between Malaysia and the United Kingdom, rooted in the British colonial legacy, emerge as a compelling reason. This shared history provides a sense of familiarity and cultural ties that drew the narrators to the United Kingdom. Additionally, Malaysia's membership in the Commonwealth is highlighted as a factor that potentially eases the migration and immigration policy processes, offering a sense of belonging to a larger international community. This detailed analysis goes beyond the surface-level understanding of migration, reaching into the personal motivations that include educational aspirations, family commitments, the pursuit of employment opportunities, and unique personal experiences. Each

narrative is a testament to the individual's journey, shaped by a desire for a life where merit and effort are recognised beyond ethnic origins. Part 4 enriches the understanding of migration by presenting it as a complex decision influenced by a myriad of factors. It shows that migration is not merely a physical move from one place to another, but a deeply personal and strategic decision influenced by historical, linguistic, and sociopolitical factors. Through the narrators' stories, this part illuminates the fluid aspect of migration, which offers comprehensive insights into the hopes, challenges, and aspirations that define the migrant experience.

Part 5 navigates the landscape of migration aspirations, challenges, and the impacts of the migratory journey from Malaysia to the United Kingdom. It begins by delving into the aspirations driving migration, highlighting the quest for equality and fairness within the education and employment sectors. Migrants seek a higher income, career advancement based on merit rather than ethnicity, and a chance to be visible in their new society. The narrative then transitions to the challenges encountered during migration, including discrimination and stereotyping, which often mar the migratory experience. These obstacles stress the complexity of adapting to a new country, setting the stage for an exploration of the impact of these experiences on settlement. The section discusses the formation of hybrid ethnocultural identities, blending cultures, and the evolving sense of belonging—navigating the delicate balance between "being" and "becoming". This part of the journey emphasises the role of the English language, immigration policies, and migration aspirations as pivotal elements that facilitate settlement in the United Kingdom. An in-depth examination of assimilation, integration, and the challenges faced by the Malaysian diaspora in the United Kingdom is presented, including discussions on the sense of belonging and the construction of a hybrid ethnocultural identity. The narrative offers comprehension of the process of becoming British, encompassing aspects of citizenship and identity, and reflects on the experience of the "in-between" space that comes with potential returns to Malaysia. Through this comprehensive analysis, this part provides a profound understanding of the nature of migration—capturing the hopes, hurdles, and transformative experiences of the Malaysian diaspora in the United Kingdom.

These parts meticulously authenticate the participants' narratives, unravelling the profound impact of ethnic-biased systems in Malaysia that curtailed educational and employment opportunities for them. Their decisive move towards the United Kingdom in pursuit of equality, enhanced economic prospects, and a more favourable lifestyle is highlighted. This journey is not just geographical but also deeply transformative, as it details

how their identities and senses of belonging were reshaped through myriad interactions and experiences within their new environment. The exploration serves as a pivotal foundation for a nuanced examination of migration experiences and identity formation among the Malaysian diaspora in the United Kingdom. By weaving together theoretical insights with empirical findings, this thematic framework endeavours to make a substantial contribution to the relevant fields of study. Navigating between migration, identity transformation, and the quest for belonging offers a perspective on the experiences of Malaysian immigrants as they steer their lives in their new country of residence.

PART 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Introduction to part 2

A literature review serves as a foundational element in the realm of academic research, furnishing a comprehensive overview and critical analysis of existing knowledge on a particular topic. In the context of comparing Malaysia's historical development with the United Kingdom's immigration policies, a literature review assumes a vital role. It not only illuminates Malaysia's past, shaping its current sociopolitical and economic landscape, but also juxtaposes these elements with the United Kingdom's approach to immigration and examines how historical legacies inform contemporary policies and societal structures. Embarking on a literature review that encompasses Malaysia from a historical perspective alongside the United Kingdom's immigration policies enables researchers to identify patterns, gaps, and emerging trends in the scholarly discourse. It fosters a multidimensional understanding, considering how historical trajectories in Malaysia might resonate with or diverge from the immigration challenges and strategies in the United Kingdom. Such a review facilitates a cross-cultural dialogue, encouraging a comparative analysis that can reveal shared challenges, unique experiences, and potential lessons to be learned from each context. Moreover, this approach aids in situating current events and policies within a broader historical and international framework, enhancing the depth and breadth of the analysis. By engaging with a wide array of sources, researchers can synthesise diverse perspectives, contributing to a more holistic and informed discourse that not only reflects on the past but also informs future policymaking and scholarly inquiries. In essence, a literature review that bridges Malaysia's history with the United Kingdom's immigration narrative is paramount for fostering a more comprehensive understanding of these complex and intersected domains.

Thus, in this part, I embark on an elaborate journey through Malaysia's historical context in Chapter 2.2, beginning with an in-depth overview of its evolution from early civilisations to the formation of Malay kingdoms and the influence of regional powers. This foundational perspective is crucial for understanding the sociopolitical and ethnocultural identity of Malaysia and the forces that have sculpted the nation's current persona. The review then transitions into the profound impact of British colonialism, examining how this period significantly redefined Malaysia's economic, political, and social landscapes, ushering in major industries and administrative systems that laid the groundwork for modern Malaysian society. Following this, the focus shifts to Malaysia's fervent march toward independence, detailing the critical events and figures that fuelled the nationalistic drive toward sovereignty, culminating in the historic achievement of independence in 1957.

Post-independence, the review explores Malaysia's journey through multiculturalism and the efforts to forge a unified national identity, highlighting the challenges and successes in integrating ethnic diversity. The examination extends to the Malaysian education sector, revealing the pressing issues of accessibility and quality, and their broader socioeconomic implications, thereby foregrounding the country's developmental path. The discourse on economic migration stresses the trend of skilled Malaysians relocating abroad, dissecting the underlying causes of this trend, its impact on Malaysia's economy, and evaluates potential countermeasures to the brain drain phenomenon. Additionally, the specific migration patterns from Malaysia to the United Kingdom are scrutinised, exploring the historical and contemporary motivations behind this movement and its effects on both nations and the immigrants.

Shifting focus to the United Kingdom, the review presents in Chapter 2.3 a thorough exploration of its immigration history, identifying pivotal migration waves and their driving factors, which are essential for understanding the evolving immigration landscape and current trends. An analysis of the immigration policies follows, illuminating the legislative influences on migrant influx and integration, and assessing their repercussions on the nation's demographic and economic structure. The examination of recent immigration trends provides insights into the demographic profiles, origins, and motivations of migrants, offering a lens through which to view the current state of British immigration. The socioeconomic aspects of immigration are assessed, delving into the contributions of immigrants to the country's economy and society, and the associated challenges. Finally, the cultural and identity dimensions of immigration are explored, assessing the impact of the diverse immigrant population on the United Kingdom's cultural landscape and the relationship between immigrant and native identities.

This comprehensive literature review not only examines the historical and contemporary dynamics of immigration between Malaysia and the United Kingdom but also offers a nuanced understanding of the impacts and implications of these movements, providing a foundation for further academic exploration.

2.2. Malaysia in a historical perspective

2.2.1. An overview

This chapter elucidates the geopolitical history of Malaysia (formerly known as Malaya) by exploring the impact of the British colonial past and the historical relationship between the coloniser and the colonised, and the current sociocultural landscape of the country. The British colonisation of Malaysia, which lasted from the first half of the 19th century until Malaysia's independence in 1957, had a profound impact on the country. The British established the Straits Settlements, which included Malacca, Singapore, and Penang, and exerted control over a set of states on the Malay Peninsula and the island of Singapore (Andaya & Andaya, 2001 [1982]; Hooker, 2003; Saw, 2015). This period of colonisation created a hierarchical relationship between Britain and Malaysia, with the remnants of this colonial history continuing to shape Malaysia politically, socially, and economically. Under British rule, the Malay elite found a place in the new colonial order as civil servants. However, many in Malaya and Borneo were adversely affected by colonial taxes, which forced them to shift from subsistence to profit agricultural farming crops (Andaya & Andaya, 2001 [1982]; Hooker, 2003; Saw, 2015). The Malay sultans retained their symbolic status at the top of an aristocratic social system, but simultaneously lost some of their political authority and independence. British policies promoted the cultivation of profit crops such as pepper, gambier, tobacco, oil palm, and especially rubber, which, along with tin, became the region's major exports (Andaya & Andaya, 2001 [1982]; Hooker, 2003; Saw, 2015).

The implications of colonisation and geopolitical interests have significantly shaped the current migration trends in Malaysia. As of 2022, there were around 2.2 million documented migrant workers in Malaysia (Department of Statistics, Malaysia). This trend, which has evolved into a culture of migration, is deeply rooted in the geopolitical interests that were established during the colonisation period. Simultaneously, Malaysia is a country of rich diversity, with a myriad of ethnicities, religions, languages, and socioeconomic statuses. These differences, however, are not without challenges. Many ethnic groups strive to safeguard their culture and rights amidst disparities that have been shaped over centuries of colonisation, settlement, exploitation, and ethnic subjugation. The connection between these two aspects lies in the historical context. The colonial legacy has not only influenced the geopolitical landscape and migration patterns but also contributed to the ethnic and cultural diversity in Malaysia. The migration trends, in turn, further add to this diversity. However, they also introduce new factors as different ethnic groups strive to maintain their unique identities and rights in the face of

these changing demographics. Thus, the colonial past of Malaysia continues to reverberate in its present-day migration trends and ethnic dynamics.

In order to gain a comprehensive understanding of Malaysia and its complexities as a country, this part of the thesis would benefit from presenting a detailed overview. This should encompass the country's geographical positioning, its diverse landscapes and climatic conditions, patterns of regional settlement, the structure of its political system, the composition of its ethnic groups, prevalent religious practices, cultural nuances, linguistic diversity, and its economy.

Mapping Malaysia



Figure 1: Map of Malaysia. Source: Nations Online Project

It is hoped that the visualisation of the country will be enhanced by the inclusion of the aforementioned map of Malaysia (Figure 1). Malaysia is a country in Southeast Asia, and it is geographically divided into two parts by the South China Sea: Peninsular Malaysia, also referred to as West Malaysia (*Barat*), and East Malaysia (*Timur*), which occupies the north and southwest regions of the island of Borneo. The country spans a total land area of approximately 329,847 km² (Hooker, 2003; Saw, 2015). Peninsular Malaysia, an extension of the mainland,

is located on the southern part of the Malay Archipelago. It shares a land border with Southern Thailand to the north and Singapore to the south, connected by the Johor-Singapore rail-and-road causeway and a bridge. Its maritime boundaries are defined by the coastline on the Strait of Malacca, which lies between Peninsular Malaysia and Sumatra, Indonesia to the west, and the South China Sea to the east. East Malaysia, situated in the northern region of Borneo, comprises two states: Sabah and Sarawak. It shares a land border with Brunei Darussalam and Kalimantan, Indonesia, and its maritime boundaries encompass the Philippines, Vietnam, South China Sea, Sulu Sea, and Celebes Sea.

Located just north of the Equator, Malaysia consists of landforms such as hill and mountain ranges, seas, rivers, mangrove swamps, and dense tropical forests. It has two seasons in the year and is subject to an equatorial climate with regular high temperatures throughout the year, coupled with heavy rainfall and high humidity levels. In the lowland areas, the temperatures can fluctuate between 22°C and 35°C, providing a warm tropical environment. In contrast, the highland regions can experience cooler temperatures, dropping to as low as 16°C, offering a respite from the heat. Rainfall patterns in Malaysia are dictated by the monsoon seasons. The northeast monsoon, occurring from October to March, brings heavy rainfall, particularly to the east coast of Peninsular Malaysia and the state of Sarawak in East Malaysia. On the other hand, the southwest monsoon, which takes place from April to September, is generally a drier period, especially for the west coast of Peninsular Malaysia. These monsoons and weather patterns have a profound impact on Malaysia's abundant biodiversity, agriculture, and internal/regional migration trends.

Similar to global trends, the climate-change phenomenon has notably affected the inhabitants of this country significantly, shaping migration dynamics through both climate-induced migration and internal or regional migration. Climate change has led to a global concern about climate-induced migration, estimating that 1.2 billion people could be relocated worldwide by 2050 as a result of natural disasters, according to the experts at the Institute for Economics and Peace (The Star, 2023; Malay Mail, 2023). Given that Southeast Asia is viewed as one of the world's regions most susceptible to climate change, the chief of mission of the International Organisation for Migration anticipated that an increasing number of migrants will arrive in Malaysia in search of a safe haven from the impacts of climate change (Malay Mail, 2023). On the other hand, it is estimated that an increasing number of Malaysians will relocate both internally, regionally and internationally as a result of climate change (Malay Mail, 2023). This trend not only alludes to internal, regional and international past and current migration

patterns, but also raises questions about Malaysia's readiness to cope with these challenges in the near future.

Migration history

The inclusion of the map in Figure 1 provides a clearer understanding of Malaysia's positioning and its ties with adjacent countries and bodies of water. This also illuminates the various interactions and relationships Malaysia maintains with these entities. These relationships can be political, economic, cultural, or environmental in nature. For example, Malaysia's maritime boundaries with the Strait of Malacca and the South China Sea have significant implications for trade, as these are major shipping routes. Additionally, this geographical knowledge is beneficial for various applications, including environmental studies, planning of infrastructure, and particularly the sociocultural and economic ties with neighbouring regions. In environmental studies, the study of a country's geographical context helps in assessing the impact of human activities on the environment, predicting natural disasters, planning conservation efforts, and studying biodiversity.

Another area is infrastructure planning, which also relies greatly on geographical knowledge. The layout of the land influences where and how infrastructure like roads, bridges, airports, and buildings are built. For instance, the Johor-Singapore rail-and-road causeway and a bridge were built considering the geographical proximity of Singapore to Peninsular Malaysia (Hooker, 2003; Saw, 2015). Over its hundred-year existence, the Rail Corridor has not only served as a crucial transportation link, but it has also engraved itself into the shared memories of individuals journeying between Singapore and Malaysia. Previously recognised as the *Keretapi Tanah Melayu* (KTM) Railway Line, it played a pivotal role in the transport of goods, communication, and passenger travel. The vision of Singapore as the beginning and end points of a railway network symbolised advancement, with the promise of connecting Singapore globally.

The inevitability of sociocultural and economic ties with adjacent regions, due to geographical proximity, aids in forecasting economic trends, interpreting migratory trends, planning social policies, and fostering diplomatic relations. For example, the intercultural exchange between Malaysia and its neighbouring countries influences and shapes the nation's cuisine, culture, linguistic practices, customs and traditions. The early sociocultural and business trade orientations of the inhabitants were very much influenced by the south-flowing rivers, mountain ranges, and seas. The inhabitants of the northern part of Peninsula Malaysia

interacted with the inhabitants from neighbouring Thailand and Burma up north (Hooker, 2003; Saw, 2015). The inhabitants of the southern part of the Peninsula interacted with the inhabitants on the islands of Sumatra, Java and southern Borneo (Hooker, 2003; Saw, 2015). The inhabitants of Sabah and Sarawak in East Malaysia had interactions with inhabitants from neighbouring islands of the southern Philippines, Sulawesi, Vietnam, Cambodia, Kalimantan, Sumatra, and Java (Hooker, 2003; Saw, 2015).

With a citizen population surpassing 33 million compared to 3.2 million non-citizens, Malaysia ranks as the 43rd most populous nation globally (Department of Statistics, Malaysia [DOSM]). Its diverse population includes numerous ethnic groups, originating from the *orang asli* – the indigenous or "original people". However, Holst notes in *Ethnicization and identity construction in Malaysia*, "British policies […] regarded the Malays officially as the original inhabitants of the Malay Peninsula (although not the first ones to populate the area)" (2012: 38). The region experienced significant migrations, notably from southern China around 35,000 years ago, leading to the establishment of new communities alongside the original inhabitants (Hooker, 2003; Saw, 2015). Over centuries, exogamous marriages between migrants from Southeast Asia and the Middle East gave rise to the Malay ethnic group as it is known today. Malaysia's strategic location fostered a plethora of external human interactions and opportunities, influencing its sociocultural development. Geologically, Malaysia benefits from volcanic inactivity, resulting in mineral-rich soil containing tin, gold, copper, iron, and aluminium. These abundant natural resources not only catalysed the nation's economic growth but also attracted the attention of the British Empire, leading to a period of exploitation that would leave an indelible mark on Malaysia's evolution over time.

Ethnic groups, culture and religion

Malaysia's demographic landscape, enriched by a diverse ethnic composition, is a defining element of its political and social fabric. According to the demographic statistics of the fourth quarter (Q4) 2023, taken by the Department of Statistics Malaysia (DOSM), the majority ethnic group in the country is the Malays, accounting for 17.7 million (57.9%) of the population. Other ethnic groups include the Chinese 6.9 million (22.6%), Other Bumiputera (various indigenous groups) 3.7 million (12.2%), Indians 2.0 million (6.6%), and Others (mixed-ethnic group) 0.2 million (0.7%) (DOSM). The gender ratio in Q4 2023 is 110 males per 100 females: 17.7 million males, with 12.5 million within the 15–64 years age group, compared to 16.0 million females, with 11.1 million within the same age group (DOSM).

Former Malaysian prime minister Mahathir Mohamad's notable work published in 1970, *The Malay Dilemma* (2008), provides a foundational analysis of this ethnic diversity, and its significant influence on Malaysia's governance and societal norms. Historian Hirschman's works (1975, 1986, 1987) offer an in-depth understanding of how these ethnic groups integrate into the nation's sociopolitical structure, while Gomez and Saravanamuttu (2013) explore the impact of these ethnic divisions on economic policy and social justice. Malaysia's diverse ethnic mosaic has been formed through a history of migrations, interactions, and the blending of different religious traditions, creating a distinct social fabric. Malaysia's rich tapestry of socio-ethnocultural diversity positions it as what I term "Little Asia", emblematic of a microcosm that encapsulates the essence of its neighbouring countries. This mosaic of Asia in Malaysia reflects a unique amalgamation, where the country emerges as a confluence of the varied cultural, social, and ethnic threads that weave the broader regional narrative. As noted by Mahathir, the country is characterised by three main ethnic groups, having "practically nothing in common" with each being unique in "their physiognomy, language, culture and religion" (2008 [1970]: 220). These pronounced differences serve as a continual reminder of the diverse ethnic identities present in Malaysia (Mahathir, 2008 [1970]).

As a result, although the official language is Malay, and English recognised as the *lingua franca* for communication, the coexistence of these languages as well as Cantonese, Tamil, and other languages in Malaysia mirrors the country's colonial history and current sociopolitical dynamics, interlacing together linguistic pluralism, national identity, and religious diversity. Holst's perspective offers a critical lens through which to view this scenario.

> [T]he language and religion of the dominant group serve as a norm and become institutionalized. A problem, however, arises "if there is more than one core religious or ethnic group, and if at least two are equally powerful," a situation that can be found in the Malaysian context. (2012: 15)

The balance between maintaining national identity and accommodating linguistic and religious diversity is a testament to the ongoing negotiation of Malaysia's multicultural identity. The country's colonial history, with its amalgamation of languages and cultures, continues to influence its sociopolitical dynamics, reflecting the broader challenges faced by pluralistic societies. The works of Hooker (2003), Rappa and Wee (2006), and Segawa (2020) provide in-depth analyses of the significance of the Malay language in shaping Malaysian identity. Hooker denotes that the "Malay language is part of the very large group known as Austronesian, whose

speakers stretch from the Pacific to Madagascar" (2003: 22). Although the official language is Malay, which bears close resemblance to the variant spoken in Indonesia, the aforementioned diverse languages are also widely utilised across the country. It is noteworthy that for a substantial portion of the Malaysian population, Malay is not their first language. Specifically, there exists a distinction between an individual's self-identified mother tongue and their actual linguistic proficiency or primary language of communication. This disparity highlights the difference between the perception of one's mother tongue and their actual fluency or predominant language use in everyday contexts (Mukherjee & David, 2011). This linguistic diversity, reflecting the myriad influences from Malaysia's historical and cultural journey, is deeply intertwined with the country's rich range of religions, which include Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Christianity. For example, India has had a profound impact on Malaysian culture, infusing it with Buddhist and Hindu beliefs, as Hooker remarks:

> The inscriptions from the late 7th century located in the region of Palembang describing Srivijaya and its ruler, are the earliest surviving evidence of the Malay language. The script is Indian and terms for geographical concepts are borrowed from Sanskrit, but the terms for political relations and authority are Old Malay. Some of those Sanskrit terms have remained in usage and appear in contemporary Malay and Indonesian—terms such as *desa* (village) and *istana* (palace). (2003: 54)

This influence is still visible today in the Malay language, literature, and numerous traditional customs.

These religious practices, combined with linguistic identities, contribute to the complex and multi-layered identity of Malaysia. Holst recognises that:

> Language and religion are tightly connected to power [insofar that] usually the language and religion of the dominant group […] serve the norm and become institutionalised. […] a situation that can be found in the Malaysian context. (2012: 15)

His analysis suggests that language and religion are not merely cultural or spiritual aspects of a society but are also critical tools through which power is exercised. In many societies, the dominant group uses its language and religion to shape societal norms, policies, and practices. This dominance can manifest in various ways, such as the language used in government,

education, and media, as well as the religious practices and holidays that are officially recognised and celebrated. The concept of institutionalisation is pivotal here, particularly when the language and religion of the dominant group become entrenched in a country's institutions, forming a powerful normative framework. This framework influences everything from legal systems to educational curricula, often to the detriment of minority languages and religions, which may be marginalised or suppressed. Thus, in the Malaysian context, where the country has a significant Malay population, which is predominantly Muslim, this group is politically and culturally dominant. Bahasa Malaysia (Malay language) is the national language, and Islam is the state religion. This has implications for how power is distributed and exercised in Malaysia, especially concerning ethnic and religious minorities like the Chinese and Indian communities, who may speak different languages (like Mandarin, Tamil, etc.) and practice different religions (like Buddhism, Hinduism, and Christianity). Holst's analysis is not unique to Malaysia; similar dynamics can be observed globally.

In Latin America, the work of scholar Evelina Dagnino in *Citizenship in Latin America: An Introduction* (2003), which explores participatory democracy in Brazil, investigating Brazil's engagement with civil society and social movements can be juxtaposed with Malaysia's handling of ethnic diversity and political participation. In the African context, Mahmood Mamdani's work in *Citizen and Subject: Contemporary Africa and the Legacy of Late Colonialism* (1996) on postcolonial governance and civil society in countries like Uganda offers a critical lens through which to view Malaysia's postcolonial trajectory. His analysis of the complexities surrounding ethnic and political identity in African states provides a comparative framework for understanding Malaysia's ethnic and political dynamics. Regarding South Asia, scholars like Amartya Sen and Ramachandra Guha provide deep analyses of India's development journey. In Sen's work, *Development as Freedom* (1999), his discussion on the capabilities approach and social justice can illuminate aspects of Malaysia's socioeconomic policies, while Guha in *India After Gandhi: The History of the World's Largest Democracy* (2007) offers an exploration of India's democratic and pluralistic fabric and offers comparative angles on managing ethnic diversity, a significant challenge for Malaysia as well. These scholarly works collectively enrich the understanding of Malaysia's position within global socioeconomic and political dynamics. Historical and contemporary examples from other parts of the world can provide comparative insights, helping to understand whether Malaysia's approach is unique or part of a broader pattern. It also invites a deep exploration of the power dynamics embedded within the fabric of Malaysian society, especially through the lenses of

language and religion. This analysis not only sheds light on Malaysia's unique sociocultural landscape but also contributes to a broader understanding of how power, culture, and identity intersect in diverse societies.

The role of the English language in Malaysia

The role of the English language is critically examined in Mukherjee and David's work in *National Language Planning and Language Shifts in Malaysian Minority Communities: Speaking in Many Tongues* (2011), as well as in Baskaran's work, *The Malaysian English mosaic* (1994), as a global linguistic force in this multilingual and multicultural context. These scholarly works collectively highlight the flow of language in shaping the unique and diverse identity of Malaysia. As explained earlier, in the context of linguistic communication, the English language functions as a global lingua franca, bridging the communication gap among groups whose native languages or dialects differ (such as Malay, Tamil, Cantonese, Mandarin, etc.). This is particularly applicable when English is a second or tertiary language, distinct from both interlocutors' primary language. The role of English as a universal medium of communication is pivotal in the context of Malaysia's interconnectedness locally and globally. The utilisation of this language exemplifies a dynamic force among linguistic, ethnic, cultural, and socioeconomic elements, culminating in a distinct English dialect in the Malaysian context. This dialectal variation is not merely phonetic or lexical but also reflects the socioeconomic stratification of Malaysian households. The colloquial English employed in domestic environments is characterised by linguistic reductions, such as the omission of grammatical elements (subjects, auxiliary verbs) and the integration of native colloquialisms (e.g., *ah*, *lah*: explained in 5.3.1), contributing to a familial and informal mode of communication (Holst, 2015).

This linguistic landscape challenges conventional definitions of native English speakers, typically associated with being "white Anglo-Saxon and from […] predominantly English-speaking countr[ies]" (Holst, 2015: 89). Davies cites Rajagopalan in *Is the native speaker dead?*:

> "[T]he quest for the pure native is part of a larger agenda that in other epochs manifested itself – and in some quarters still does – as the quest for the pure race" (1997, p. 229). Since there are no "viable and fool-proof criteria for identifying a native" (*ibid.*, p. 228) then all that is left is the "myth of nativity" (*ibid.*, p. 229). (2013: 19)

The problematic quest for a "pure native" which leads to questioning the validity of this classification based on a "myth of nativity", prompts a re-evaluation of the concept of native speakers. In the ethnically diverse and multilingual Malaysian milieu, the concept of a "mother tongue or native language" acquires additional considerations, specifically "in migrant communities where the correspondence between ethnicity and language has become increasingly blurred" (Holst, 2015: 89). The proficiency achieved in English, predominantly colloquial in nature, necessitates a revaluation of fluency metrics, shifting from "norm-referenced against the standard variety" (Holst, 2015: 89). Moreover, the Malaysian setting complicates traditional perceptions of language ownership and linguistic identity. Individuals may identify English as their primary language without corresponding ethnic affiliations, thereby challenging established notions of linguistic authenticity and primacy, leading to a "dilemma of whose English is better or more correct as evident from studies on attitudes towards local varieties of English" (Holst, 2015: 90). Davies's conclusion might clarify this aspect:

> The idea that all native speakers are at level C2 on the Common European Framework scale makes no sense. Some perhaps are, but they are unusual. C2 is the level of *the native speaker*, an idealization (isomorphic with the Standard Language, itself an idealization). Models, scales, examinations which use as criterion the native speaker do not mean any or all native speakers. What they mean is *the (idealized) native speaker.* It is not surprising, therefore, that a group of educated non-native speakers may out-perform a group of native speakers on a proficiency test. What their education has done for the non-native speakers is to imbue them with the knowledge of *the (idealized) native speaker*, that is of the Standard Language. Proficiency tests are all about knowledge of the Standard Language, which is exactly what non-native speakers have been trained in. (2013: 26)

Davies argues that the assumption that native speakers inherently possess the highest proficiency level (C2) in the Common European Framework is incorrect, stating that C2 represents an idealised version of a native speaker, aligned with the Standard Language. This idealisation does not accurately reflect the diverse competencies of actual native speakers. Thus, educated non-native speakers, trained in the Standard Language, can outperform native speakers in proficiency tests, which assess knowledge of this idealised standard rather than

real-world linguistic abilities. Davies's observations on language proficiency and the notion of "*the (idealized) native speaker*" echo Kanno's perspective on the relationship between language and identity, where identity is a construct influenced by "our sense of who we are and our relationship to the world", with language choice being a pivotal factor for "a reflection of dual or multiples identities, where people use different languages or variants of it to weave in and out of different identities" (Kanno in Holst, 2015: 91). In a similar line of argument as Kanno, Hanks in Paikeday's *The Native Speaker Is Dead!* gives merit to "viewing the "native speaker" as a theoretical construct rather than as flesh and bone" (2003: 16). Furthermore, Paikeday describes how bilinguals demonstrating "nativelike" competence in English, regardless of how or where they acquired the language, should also be considered "native speakers of English" (2003: 35). In Malaysia, this often results in the manifestation of dual or multiple identities, navigated through the strategic use of different languages or dialects. Additionally, the prevalent practice of code-switching and accent modification in Malaysia transcends communicative functionality, serving as a medium for expressing solidarity and constructing a collective Malaysian identity (Holst, 2015). This linguistic adaptability epitomises the role of language as a fundamental aspect of Malaysian identity, and the connection between language, identity, and societal norms within a multicultural and multilingual framework.

Economy

Malaysia's economy and societal structure are shaped by its abundant biodiversity, strategic geographical location, and diverse cultural heritage. The country, located in the heart of Southeast Asia, boasts an abundant variety of flora and fauna, many of which are unique to the region, contributing both directly and indirectly to its economy. Its forests yield timber and non-timber products, while its marine ecosystems support a significant fisheries sector. Additionally, Malaysia's mineral resources, such as tin, oil, and gas, have been pivotal in driving economic growth and integrating the nation into the global economy. The strategic position of Malaysia, flanked by the Strait of Malacca and the South China Sea, two crucial cargo shipping lanes, has historically made it a key trading point between the East and West. This geographic advantage has transformed Malaysia into a hub for regional and international trade, fostering a multicultural society deeply integrated into global trade networks. The country's economy is remarkably diversified, with robust manufacturing, services, and agricultural sectors.

Historically rooted in the production of tin, rubber, and palm oil, Malaysia developed under the influence of various Malay sultanates and the British Empire. The latter's economic expansion stemmed from "India [as it] was a platform from which British business had advanced across Asia" (Darwin, 2011: 187), which influenced regional economic trajectories through its control over trade routes (Hooker, 2003; Saw, 2015). This control facilitated cultural and technological exchanges and stimulated local economies. However, reliance on primary commodities made the economy susceptible to global market fluctuations. The 20th century marked a significant transition towards manufacturing and services, bolstered by Special Economic Zones and foreign investment-friendly policies (Hooker, 2003; Saw, 2015). Today, Malaysia's manufacturing sector, particularly in the electronics and automotive industries, contributes significantly to its GDP (Saw, 2015, Benson & O'Reilly, 2018). Additionally, Malaysia has emerged as the world's largest Islamic banking and financial centre, reflecting its robust financial sector and adherence to Islamic law (Saw, 2015, Benson & O'Reilly, 2018). The urban landscape of Malaysia, characterised by high-rise apartments and bustling business districts, mirrors its rapid urbanisation and economic development. These urban features accommodate a growing population and serve as economic hubs for various businesses.

The country's economic policies and nation-building efforts showcase a myriad of linguistic diversity, religious pluralism, and evolving economic landscapes. The *Bumiputera* policies, aimed at empowering native Malaysians, coexist with efforts to attract foreign investment, a balance analysed by Jomo K.S.'s book edition, *Malaysian Industrial Policy* (2007). The country's approach to fostering a national culture amidst religious diversity and the prominence of English further underpins its complex identity.

Education system

The evolution of Malaysia's education system is a subject of extensive scholarly analysis, yielding profound knowledge about the education, ethnicity, and national policy arenas. Notable works in this field provide a deeper understanding of the complexities and challenges faced by the Malaysian education system over time. One seminal work is by Tan Y. S. and R. Santhiram in *The Education of Ethnic Minorities: The Case of the Malaysian Chinese* (2010). They offer a comprehensive analysis of how the Malaysian education system has catered to the needs of the Chinese minority, illustrating the broader implications for ethnic relations in Malaysia. The authors contend that Malaysia's dual education system, which includes both national and vernacular schools, is vital for maintaining ethnic identity and fostering national

unity. By providing Tamil and Chinese language primary schools, the system supports minority groups, yet transitions to predominantly Malay instruction in secondary and higher education. This bilingual shift for minority students is examined within the system's historical framework and under the influence of language policies. The authors highlight that these policies mirror the dynamics between majority and minority groups, aiming to facilitate nation-building and interethnic integration, rather than prioritising educational quality alone.

Rashid A.'s *Education and nation formation in Malaysia: a structural analysis* (2002) stands as a significant scholarly work that delves into the evolution of Malaysia's educational landscape, tracing its journey from the era of colonial rule to the postcolonial period. Rashid's analysis meticulously unpacks how the shift in educational policies over time has shaped the process of nation-building and the sociopolitical landscape in Malaysia. The study sheds light on the transition from educational systems and doctrines imposed during colonial times to those that emerged after gaining independence, aiming to foster a sense of national identity and unity among Malaysia's diverse ethnic groups. Furthermore, his work highlights the challenges and controversies that have accompanied the implementation of these educational policies, particularly in terms of balancing the needs and aspirations of Malaysia's multiethnic population. The impact of these policies on ethnic relations, social integration, and national cohesion is critically assessed, providing insights into the successes and limitations of education as a means of nation formation in Malaysia.

Further, Symaco, L. and Wan, C. D. in *Development of Higher Education in Malaysia* (2017) explore the role of education in Malaysia's socioeconomic development, and how educational policies have helped mitigate socioeconomic disparities and propelled economic advancement. They provide an in-depth examination of Malaysia's higher education sector's evolution over six decades, beginning with a historical perspective from the inception of universities as part of the First Malaysia Plan to the latest advancements. The study examines the changing roles and functions of universities over these years, offering a detailed backdrop for understanding these transitions. Furthermore, the analysis sheds light on the expansion of both public and private higher education institutions, as well as the unique challenges and issues each sector faces. It culminates in a discussion on significant concerns within Malaysian higher education, such as the dynamic relationship between the state and universities, the globalisation of higher education services, and the effort towards ensuring a more inclusive higher education landscape. Through this integrated approach, the narrative highlights the

integral connection between educational policies, the evolution of higher education, and Malaysia's broader socioeconomic progress.

These are some of the scholarly works that collectively offer a nuanced understanding of the Malaysian education system's evolution. They highlight the balancing act between preserving ethnic diversity, promoting national unity, and preparing for global competitiveness. Each of these works contributes to the academic discourse on education in multiethnic societies, particularly in the context of postcolonial nation-building and development.

Political structure

Malaysia, a federal constitutional monarchy, consists of 13 states and three federal territories. The national capital, Kuala Lumpur, is situated in the peninsula's western part, is the country's largest city and serves as the seat of the legislative branch. Meanwhile, Putrajaya functions as the administrative centre, housing the executive and judicial branches of the federal government. This nation operates under a federal democratic constitutional monarchy, with a King/*Agong*, currently Abdullah of Pahang, as the head of state, and a Prime Minister, presently Anwar Ibrahim, as the head of government. The administrative framework includes executive power shared between the federal and 13 state governments, legislative power vested in the Parliament and state assemblies, and an independent judiciary.

The lineage of Prime Ministers in Malaysia reflects the nation's evolving political and social dynamics since its independence in 1957. Works by Andaya and Andaya in *A History of Malaysia* (2001, [1982]), Hooker, *A Short History of Malaysia: Linking East and West* (2003) and Saw, *The Population of Malaysia* (2015) have been useful for providing knowledge on the political history and structure of Malaysia. Tunku Abdul Rahman, serving from 1957 to 1970 and revered as the "Father of Independence", was instrumental in leading Malaysia through its formative years, including the significant formation of Malaysia in 1963 and managing the Indonesia-Malaysia confrontation. He was succeeded by Abdul Razak Hussein (1970-1976), who responded to the racial riots of May 13, 1969, by introducing the New Economic Policy (NEP), focusing on national unity and poverty eradication. Hussein Onn, from 1976 to 1981, upheld Razak's legacy, being known for his integrity and emphasis on health and housing policies. Following him was Mahathir Mohamad, whose tenure from 1981 to 2003, and then again from 2018 to 2020, marked him as Malaysia's longest-serving Prime Minister. He is recognised for his robust modernised policies and dramatic return to power in 2018, signalling a historic shift in electoral politics. Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, leading from 2003 to 2009,

continued the path of economic reforms and introduced the Islam *Hadhari*[7] approach. His successor, Najib Razak (2009-2018), focused on economic liberalisation, although his administration was marred by controversies like the 1MDB scandal. The baton was then passed to Muhyiddin Yassin (2020-2021), whose tenure was predominantly marked by the challenges of managing the COVID-19 pandemic amidst political instability. Ismail Sabri Yaakob, in office from 2021 to 2023, concentrated on pandemic recovery and the consolidation of political stability. The current phase of Malaysia's political journey is led by Anwar Ibrahim (2023-Present), who carries the expectations of addressing the governance challenges of the past and fostering a sense of national unity. Each of these leaders has played a fundamental role in shaping the trajectory of Malaysian governance, navigating the complexities of a multiethnic and rapidly evolving society.

Significantly, the Malaysian legal system classifies citizens by ethnicity and religion, granting special treatment based on these classifications, leading to a distinctive system of rights and privileges that is deeply entwined with the country's political and governance structures. Malaysia's formation as a nation-state in 1963, alongside the longer histories of its ethnic groups, presents challenges in crafting cohesive national narratives. A significant fact is in Article 153 of the Malaysian constitution which bestows special privileges on Islam, Malays, and the natives of Sabah and Sarawak, with a 1975 court ruling protecting these rights from legal challenge. Consequently, discussions of national identity elements are sensitive and potentially illegal, even in parliamentary contexts. The government's approach to national identity involves compromises. While Malay is the official language, other languages are permitted in broadcasting, publishing, and education. Government schools use Malay, but Chinese and Tamil primary schools, supported by government grants, align with public education standards. In business, a policy mandates 30% equity ownership by the officialised government classification of 'native' Malaysians (*Bumiputera*), aimed at improving their economic standing. However, this policy is often circumvented, and its impact is diluted by liberal foreign investment policies. Through this framework, the country faces challenges due to its diverse ethnic makeup and a cultural heritage extending beyond current national borders.

This classification plays a crucial role in shaping Malaysia's political dynamics and governance, as explored in depth by Mauzy and Milne in *Malaysian Politics under Mahathir*

[7] Lemière explains the meaning of Islam Hadhari as a "ready-to-use way of life labelled "Islam Hadhari," or civilizational Islam". (2018: 40)

(1999) and further analysed by Harding in *The Constitution of Malaysia: A Contextual Analysis* (2012). Their works provide a detailed examination of the political landscape during Mahathir Mohamad's tenure as one of Southeast Asia's most enigmatic leaders, examining his personality, policies, and their impact on Malaysia's socioeconomic and political landscape. Malaysia's transformation into a booming Tiger economy under Mahathir was marked by rapid economic growth and significant poverty reduction, though his achievements have been challenged by recent economic downturns and increased scrutiny of his governance. The works explore Mahathir's approach to managing ethnic tensions, industrialisation, modernisation, foreign policy, grand projects, human rights issues, and corruption. The narratives also cover the dramatic fall of Anwar Ibrahim, Mahathir's deputy, emphasising the complexities of Malaysia's political dynamics. They further contextualise Malaysia's constitutional framework established at independence in 1957, initially modelled after the Westminster system, and how it has adapted to the country's evolving sociopolitical needs. The shift from ethnic to religious tensions as the primary source of discord is also addressed, assessing how Malaysia's constitution, challenged during Mahathir's authoritarian regime, remains a cornerstone of its national identity and governance amidst ongoing communal strife. Through this lens, the authors offer insight into the resilience and relevance of Malaysia's constitution in navigating the country's unique challenges in constitutional governance, while considering the lasting effects of British colonialism.

In addition, the works of Andaya and Andaya (2001, [1982]) and Milner in *The Malays* (2008) delve into the journey of Malaysia's nationhood and the difficulty of crafting a cohesive national narrative amidst the entrenched diversity of Malay, Chinese, Indian, and indigenous communities. These scholarly contributions bring to the fore the efforts to forge a unified national identity that respects and incorporates the varied histories, cultures, and religions of its people, all the while contending with the lingering impacts of British colonial rule. The endeavour to reconcile these diverse identities and histories into a singular national narrative is central to understanding Malaysia's ongoing journey towards attempting a harmonious and inclusive national identity. Milner engages in the question of who exactly the Malays are and analyses how the definitions have evolved over time and vary across different regions and considers the historical context to debate the concepts of ethnicity and identity within the Malay world. He provides an in-depth look at the formation and evolution of Malay identity, ethnicity, and self-awareness across five centuries. The book examines the political, economic, and cultural growth of the Malay people and investigates the impact of Malay culture and identity

within Southeast Asia. Bridging these notions, it illustrates how the growth and identity of the Malay people within Southeast Asia serve as a backdrop to the task of defining Malaysia's national culture, a process complicated by its colonial past and European influences. This is key to understanding Malaysia's regional and global standing.

2.2.2. Colonial Impact: Malaysia's British colonial period

For a comprehensive analysis of the British impact on Malaysia, it is essential to consider the historical link between Malaysia and the United Kingdom. Harari in *Sapiens: A Brief History of Humankind* observes that "[a] century ago almost any place on earth could have become part of the British Empire, and that the British Empire, 'the largest empire in history, was ruled by a democracy', similar to "[o]ther democratic empires [...] French, Belgian and American empires" (Harari, 2011: 212-13). The British colonial era in Malaysia "was not a temporary phenomenon", spanning over 150 years, beginning in the late 18th century and culminating with Malaysia's independence in 1957, which left a "permanent and institutionalised Western presence on the local populations" (Hooker, 2003: 131). During the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the indirect rule of the British implemented a labour system involving indenture as part of their imperial capitalist trade. This led to the substantial immigration of Chinese and Indian labourers to Malaya (as Malaysia was known in the 19th century) to meet the labour needs of tin mining and rubber plantations. Hooker reports:

> Although there is evidence of permanent Chinese settlement from as early as the 14th century, large-scale migration from China and India did not occur until the 19th century. Forced by dire conditions in their own country to seek their livelihood elsewhere, Chinese from the maritime provinces of southeastern China migrated to the Peninsula and Borneo. From their work as labourers in tin-mines and the building industry, many prospered and invested their savings in enterprises such as mines, plantations, factories, shops and banks, forming institutional networks now regarded as characteristic of the overseas Chinese. (2003: 26)

Aligning with Hooker, Dalziel in *The Penguin Historical Atlas of the British Empire* posits:

> Other peoples, including Indians, Chinese and Pacific Islanders, were moved around the globe in what has been called a 'new system of slavery', indentured labour. (2006: 9)

During this period, the British colonial administration adopted a 'divide and rule' strategy to manage the varied, multiethnic population of "distinct peoples, each possessing a different cultural identity and a separate territory" (Harari, 2011: 212), a tactic characteristic of British governance methods. This strategy was "often seen as a component of colonial rule as they weaken and disunite the colonized society, requir[ing] categories into which the population can

be divided, for example social status, economic factors, or ethnicized identity" (Holst, 2012: 35). By extension, it was designed to maintain control over Malaysia's diverse ethnic landscape with the aim to foster divisions and prevent unity among the local population. It "encouraged residential segregation" based on its "own internal regulations and hierarchy" (Darwin, 2012: 34). This approach of effectively "setting apart of their factory from indigenous settlement", reinforced the divide and rule policy by separating different ethnic groups and preventing cohesive unity (Darwin, 2012: 34). Based on Ashley Jackson's articulation in *The British Empire: A very short introduction*:

> According to some scholars, "'settlerism' was a more important process in the 'Anglobalization' of the world than imperialism per se. The 'cloning' of British society, to use James Belich's term, was the most significant process in modern history. (2013: 67)

In the context of "Anglobalization" and "cloning", the establishment of colonies significantly shaped Malaysia's cultural and architectural landscape. Certain states in Malaysia still bear these vestiges, such as Cameron Highlands in Pahang, Maxwell Hill in Taiping, St. Michael's Institution in Ipoh, Penang Free School, and the Ipoh railway station, which exemplify enduring colonial architectural influences. Moreover, the influx of a substantial number of Chinese and Indian labourers, a topic explored in-depth in Amarjit Kaur's work *Malaysia Labour migration, irregular movements and regional policies*, profoundly transformed Malaysia's demographic fabric.

> Chinese and Indian workers dominated the earlier colonial migration flows, currently Southeast Asian and other Asian migrants represent about 25 percent of Malaysia's workforce. Unlike other traditional migration countries, the temporary migration route dominates migration to the country. (in Pietsch & Clark, 2015: 75)

This labour migration, necessitated by the demands of tin mining and rubber plantations, and without which "Malaysia could not have become the world's largest producer of tin by 1900 and producer of half the world's rubber by 1924" (Hooker, 2003: 157), had profound implications for the ethnic and social forces of the region. Kaur's analysis highlights how these demographic changes have had long-lasting effects on Malaysian society, influencing everything from economic structures to ethnic relations. This strategy was integral to maintaining control and facilitating administration in the colonial context, significantly

impacting the sociopolitical fabric of Malaysia. Consequently, and as partly indicated in section 2.2.1, Malaysia's 2000 and 2023 census data reveal demographic shifts: the Bumiputera population increased from 65.1% in 2000 to a broader category including Malays at 57.9% and Other Bumiputera at 12.2% in 2023 (DOSM). Chinese and Indian populations decreased from 26.0% and 7.7% in 2000 to 22.6% and 6.6% in 2023, respectively (DOSM). The data indicate a diversifying national demographic with evolving proportions of ethnic groups over the years.

Scholars like J. S. Furnivall (1948), Darwin (1991, 2009, 2012), McIntyre (1998), Brown *et al*., (1999), Winks *et al*., (1999), Dalziel (2006), Hyam, R. (2007, 2010) and Harari (2011) have examined the economic implications of British rule, noting how the colonial economy was heavily oriented towards export commodities, with a significant reliance on imported labour. This economic structure, they argue, had long-term consequences for the post-independence economic development and contributed to enduring ethnic and class disparities. In *Colonial Policy and Practice: A Comparative Study of Burma and Netherlands India,* Furnivall (2014 [1948]) postulates:

> Each group holds by its own religion, its own culture and language, its own ideas and ways. As individuals they meet, but only in the market place, in buying and selling. There is a plural society, with different sections of the community living side by side, but separately, within the same political unit. Even in the economic sphere there is a division of labour along racial lines. Natives, Chinese, Indians and Europeans all have different functions, and within each major group subsections have particular occupations. […] whether the objective of power has been to tribute, trade or material sources; under direct rule and under indirect. (2014 (1948): 304-5)

This observation acknowledges the way colonial powers exploited existing racial and ethnic divisions to maintain control and facilitate economic exploitation. By assigning specific occupations to different racial groups, colonial administrations could reinforce social hierarchies and dependencies, ensuring a stable and controlled labour force. This division of labour, based on "racial lines", also served to prevent unified resistance against colonial rule, as it often pitted different groups against each other. Moreover, Furnivall's analysis draws attention to the long-term impact of colonial policies, highlighting how these divisions often persisted even after the end of colonial rule, influencing social and economic inequalities and tensions in postcolonial societies. Furthermore, John Darwin in *Unfinished Empire: The Global*

Expansion of Britain notes that the legacy of colonialism in "settler communities" and beyond was not merely a tale of "domination and subjection" (2012: 11). It represented a more complex scenario:

> [T]he creation of novel or hybrid societies in which notions of governance, economic assumptions, religious values and morals, ideas about property, and conceptions of justice, conflicted and mingled, [were] reinvented, refashioned, tried out or abandoned (Darwin, 2012: 11).

This underlines the profound influence of colonialism on the development and identity of postcolonial societies.

Hirschman's interpretation of the "European idea of race" classification for census purposes in *The Meaning and Measurement of Ethnicity in Malaysia: An Analysis of Census Classifications* provides a critical examination of how European imperial roles and racial beliefs intersected (1987: 569). His research investigates ethnic categorisation in census-taking, particularly in the context of colonial empires where such classifications were pivotal for governance and control.

> [C]hanges in racial ideology had clear effects on ethnic classifications in censuses. Given the limitations of other forms of historical records (ideas that seem self-evident are rarely the subject of bureaucratic record keeping), the census classifications provide important evidence on the development of European racism in colonial Malaya. Although many of the outward forms of racist thinking have been eliminated from census classification in the post-Independence era, the residue of racial ideology continues to haunt contemporary Malaysia. (1987: 570)

Evidently, the use of ethnic classifications in census data collection by the colonial administration was not merely a bureaucratic exercise. It was deeply intertwined with broader imperialist ideologies and strategies, highlighting the profound influence of "racial ideology" on these classifications. These classifications served as historical evidence of racism, demonstrating how deeply rooted and pervasive these ideologies were. As noted by Nair in Holst:

> In order to create a feeling of belonging to an ethnicized group in areas where the notion of ethnicity did not exist before (at least not to that extent), the

> census turned out to be a powerful and normative, yet at the same time often arbitrary tool. (in Holst, 2012: 36)

Despite temporal shifts, the societal imprint of racial ideologies persists, embodying and testifying to their enduring power in shaping societal structures and perceptions. On a similar note, Darwin explores the broader theme of "empire as […] a system of racial oppression" (2012: 4). Darwin's historical analysis presents the British Empire and, by extension, other European empires, as systems fundamentally built on and perpetuating ethnic hierarchies and divisions. This critical perspective illuminates the effectiveness of the 'divide and rule' strategy employed by colonial administrations, notably by the British in Malaysia, as a "process of alignment to a manageable amount" of the nation's multiethnic inhabitants (Nair in Holst, 2012: 36). This strategy, as highlighted by Darwin (2012) and Nair (in Holst, 2012), was central to the colonial governance approach, effectively controlling the diverse population through deliberate segregation and division, "which intentionally segregated the Malays, Chinese and Indians who served different needs in the fast, expanding imperial spaces" (Nair in Holst, 2012: 36). However, the census brought to light further disparities:

> […] it created sharper boundaries between ethnicized groups in which people had to decide whether they were either Malay or Chinese […] whereas "mixed" persons became thus some sort of an anomaly. […] a number of cultural, linguistic or religion sub-groups simply had no place in an ethnicized census.

Such a binary system of classification not only excludes a broad spectrum of "mixed" or *Lain-lain* (Other) identities, but also perpetuates a sense of alienation among those who do not correspond to the established categories. This exclusion reflects societal hierarchies, privileging certain identities over others, a strategy that has resulted in the polarisation of the population within Malaysia, reinforcing and exploiting existing ethnic and racial divisions for political control.

The introduction and enforcement of such ethnic categorisations and divisions created, as Darwin points out, a "false notion of 'traditional' society" under imperial rule (2012: 5).

> Cultural imperialism's founding precept was the patent superiority of the European (in this case the British) over the non-European 'Other'. […] destroying the authority of indigenous posing its own, it wrecked the self-

> confidence and creative capacity [of] local elites and drove a deep wedge between a collaborative minor seduced by the charms of imported ideas and the rest of society [and] erected a false notion of 'traditional' society. (2012: 5)

"Cultural imperialism", anchored in the perceived European supremacy above "the non-European 'Other'", dismantled the authority of indigenous societies, imposed its own structures, and lured a minority with foreign ideas. This led to societal divisions and the establishment of an inaccurate concept of "'traditional' society'". This artificial restructuring of societal norms and relationships under the British Empire left a profound and enduring imprint on the social and ethnic dynamics in Malaysia. Harari posits that empires have been instrumental in merging minority cultures into larger ones.

> Empires have played a decisive part in amalgamating many small cultures into fewer big cultures. [...] to make life easier for themselves. [...] difficult to rule an empire in which every little district has its own set of laws, its own form of writing, its own language and its own money. Standardisation was a boon to emperors. (2011: 221)

It appears that this merging was propelled by the pragmatic requirements of the empires. This instigated a process of standardisation, advantageous to the emperors, but potentially leading to the dilution of local cultures and traditions. The power dynamics inherent in these relationships saw imperial powers enforcing changes and standards that favoured their interests, frequently to the detriment of local cultures and societal norms.

The collective insights from scholarly works on colonial empires offer a comprehensive understanding of how ethnicity was not only a conceptual tool but also a pivotal element in the functioning and perpetuation of these empires. The employment of 'race' in census-taking, combined with the execution of divisive political strategies like 'divide and rule', significantly shaped the social fabric under colonial rule. These practices were integral in controlling diverse populations and have left a profound and complex legacy on former colonies. Specifically, in the context of British colonialism in Malaysia, these strategies led to political manipulation, economic exploitation, and demographic transformation, deeply influencing Malaysia's current social, economic, and political landscape. Moreover, this analysis extends beyond Malaysia, providing vital insights into the historical origins of racial and ethnic disparities globally.

Jackson posits that the introduction of advanced technologies had a positive impact on India, noting:

> [S]uch 'benefits' were either unintentional, or were not as beneficial as is claimed. The British did not build railways in India, for example, in order to help Indians or to nurture a future independent Indian state. They did it for their own strategic and economic purposes, sometimes using forced labour, and many Indians died in the process. The fact that Indians benefited from transport links designed to ease the movement of raw materials and troops, and that now the Indian State benefits, is a subsidiary factor. (2013: 124)

Jackson argues that Britain's infrastructural developments in India, such as railways, were mainly for its own gains, with any benefits to Indians being incidental and not the primary goal. The construction process often involved forced labour that resulted in the exploitation of Indians and casualties in the course of these endeavours. On other colonial empires, studies by Hoey in *Nationalism in Indonesia: Building Imagined and Intentional Communities through Transmigration* (2003) and White in *The Settlement of Decolonization and Post-Colonial Economic Development: Indonesia, Malaysia, and Singapore Compared* (2017) have shown that Dutch colonialism significantly reshaped Indonesia's local cultures, societal norms, and relationships, leading to industrialisation and increased economic activity through the establishment of a large sugar industry, particularly in Java, often at the cost of forced labour for locals. The Dutch also formed European enclaves in major cities, creating social divisions and a caste society, falling in line with Harari's observation that empires "divided people into make-believe groups, arranged in a hierarchy. The upper levels enjoyed privileges and power, while the lower ones suffered from discrimination and oppression" (2011: 149). These colonial impacts continue to influence Indonesia's societal structures and cultural practices today. Grasping the socioeconomic dynamics in postcolonial societies is crucial, as the remnants of colonial rule persistently influence employment patterns, wealth distribution, and social relationships.

Colonialism had a profound impact on local cultures across Asia. The colonial powers, such as the British and Dutch, implemented policies and systems that led to significant changes in societal norms, traditions, and identities. The changes brought about by colonialism often involved the imposition of foreign languages, religions, and social structures, leading to a significant transformation of local cultures. This is exemplified by "[s]ome [who] see the

British Empire as an early exercise in globalization, spreading a single language and common cultural elements, political, legal and educational systems as well as commercial patterns, transport infrastructures and currency flows" (Dalziel, 2006: 9), further influencing the local cultures. The dominance of colonial powers often resulted in the erosion or suppression of indigenous cultures and traditions. While colonial rule often led to the creation of new social and ethnic identities, causing societal divisions and conflicts that persist today, it also sparked resistance and adaptation. Many local populations resisted the cultural changes imposed by colonial powers, leading to forms of cultural syncretism where elements of indigenous and colonial cultures were blended, as Hahn expounds in *Cross-Cultural Exchange and the Colonial Imaginary: Global Encounters via Southeast Asia*:

> For long, the standard narrative of colonial culture has been one of domination and imposition of the colonizers' cultures on colonized societies and subsequent erosion of local cultures due to "modernization" seen as Westernization. (2019: 1)

As Hahn expounds, the interaction between the imposed colonial cultures and indigenous traditions is not a simple story of cultural erasure but one of cultural negotiation and adaptation. This view is further exemplified by the specific impact of British colonial policies in Malaysia.

> British policies did indeed have a permanent effect on the Malaysian territories through the fixing of their international and many of their internal borders, as well as on the way they were governed. (Hooker, 2003: 132)

While these policies undeniably brought significant cultural changes, they also contributed to the unique syncretic cultural landscape, illustrating how local responses to colonialism were not merely passive but actively shaped the evolving ethnocultural identities, resulting in unique cultural syntheses that are a testament to the resilience of these societies.

2.2.3. The road to *Merdeka* (Independence)

This broader knowledge of racial and ethnic disparities, and the socioeconomic dynamics in postcolonial societies, provides a crucial context for examining specific historical events. One such event is the Japanese Occupation of Malaya from 1941 to 1945, a period that further draws attention to colonialism, culture, and socioeconomic dynamics. This period, marked by terror and upheaval, played a pivotal role in challenging the perceived invincibility of British colonial rule, thereby significantly influencing the inhabitants' push towards independence (Mahathir, 2008 [1970]). For, "in South Asia, […] the British were clearly on the back foot, [and] after the war they were in a newly expansive mood. In the wake of Japan's surrender, Malaya and North Borneo were re-occupied" (McIntyre, 1998: 3). This shift in perception was a crucial step in the journey of Malaya's transformation and its eventual emergence as a sovereign nation. The formation of the Malayan Union in 1946 by the British was central to the history of Malaya, now Malaysia, marked by significant political shifts and anti-colonial sentiments. As McIntyre notes:

> The Colonial Office had sent a Governor-General to Malaya with overall control of the British dependencies in the region, where major changes were under way. Malaya was potentially the prime dollar earner of the Empire because of its rubber and tin, and the rulers of the Malay States [...] had been forced after the war to give up, for the first time, full powers and jurisdiction to the Crown, and they were joined in a new Malayan Union. (1998: 3)

The establishment of the Malayan Union in the aftermath of World War II marked a pivotal moment in the history of Malaya, now Malaysia, as it attempted to bring about significant changes to the political and social structure of the region. The Union's proposal, which aimed to integrate the various ethnic groups within Malaya under a single administrative entity, represented a radical departure from previous policies. It sought, regardless of ethnicity, a "return to the granting of citizenship and permission of political participation to those groups who were economically better off than Malays—the Chinese and the Indians" (Horii in Soomro *et al.*, 2014: 5), which was a progressive move towards inclusivity but stirred controversy, particularly among the Malay population. The Malay elites, who had traditionally held a privileged position in the societal hierarchy, viewed the Malayan Union's policies as a direct threat to their status and political influence (Hooker, 2003; Soomro *et al.*, 2014). The proposal to extend equal rights to the Chinese and Indian populations was perceived as undermining the

sociopolitical supremacy of the Malays. This fear of losing pre-eminence and "the abolition of [the] sultan system" led to the formation of the United Malays National Organisation (UMNO) in 1946 by the Malay elites (Soomro *et al.*, 2014: 5). UMNO was established with the primary goal of preserving Malays' "special privileges written in the constitution", acting as a counterbalance to the perceived egalitarian approach of the Malayan Union (Soomro *et al.*, 2014: 5). The reaction from the Malay community was not only indicative of the ethnic tensions that existed within Malaya but also of the complexities of creating a unified national identity in a multiethnic society. The strong opposition from UMNO and the broader Malay community forced the British colonial administration to reconsider their approach, leading to the dissolution of the Malayan Union in 1948. It was replaced by the Federation of Malaya, which reinstated the preferential status of Malays within the political framework, thus addressing the concerns raised by the Malay elites. Hahn elaborates:

> An example of this process in action in British Malaya was the inclusion of Malay traditional literature in government textbooks […] as a way to improve Malay literacy and expand government education programs […]. These educational programs were part of a larger initiative to modernize the colony, solidify ties between the Malays and the British government, reinforce the role of Malays as a "privileged race," and protect "aggressive" and "politically mature" Chinese. (2019: 50-51)

The long-term impact of these policies was profound, laying the groundwork for the political landscape of post-independence Malaysia. The preferential treatment of Malays and the emphasis on their literature and education have had lasting effects on Malaysian society, influencing ethnic relations, national identity, and political structures. This educational strategy, while seemingly benign in its cultural respect, was a cog in the larger machine of colonial strategy, with effects resonating beyond the end of British rule. The establishment of UMNO catalysed the formation of other ethnically based political parties, such as the Malayan Chinese Association (MCA) and the Malayan Indian Congress (MIC). These parties eventually formed the backbone of the National Front (Barisan Nasional) coalition, which governed Malaysia from its independence in 1957 until 2018 (Hooker, 2003). The evolution from the Malayan Union to the Federation of Malaya and the subsequent political developments denote the challenges of balancing ethnic diversity with national unity in the formation of modern nation-states. This period was crucial in shaping the political, social, and ethnic dynamics that continue to influence Malaysia today.

The period between 1946 and 1948 was not just about the confrontation between the colonial powers and local nationalists but also marked the onset of the Cold War era in Southeast Asia. The Malayan Emergency (1948–1960) was more than just an anti-colonial rebellion. Chinese immigrants were relocated to New Villages to separate them from communist influence, which exacerbated ethnic tensions. Although primarily aimed at suppressing communism, this period also set the stage for Malaysia's ethnic-centric political framework. The British engaged the Malayan National Liberation Army (MNLA), portraying it as a communist insurgency, while the MNLA identified itself as an anti-colonial force. The British response to the anti-colonial movement in Malaya was predominantly centred on neutralising the perceived communist threat. However, the burgeoning nationalist movements posed a significant challenge to colonial authority as well. Notably, Malay nationalists within UMNO and other groups levied accusations against Chinese and Indian communities, alleging that these groups harboured a "greater affinity for China and India than for Malaya" (Nair in Holst, 2012: 36). Such tensions highlighted the complex interethnic dynamics at play during the anti-colonial struggle. According to Nair, as cited in Holst (2012), these nationalist movements, while diverse in their grievances and aspirations, collectively intensified the pressure on colonial rule, signalling a crucial phase in Malaya's journey towards independence. This period marked a pivotal moment in the "anti-colonial struggle" (Nair in Holst, 2012: 36), as the movements not only confronted colonial powers but also navigated Malaya's ethnic and national identity. The anti-colonial conflict was pivotal in paving the way for Malaya's 1957 independence and influencing its postcolonial trajectory. The Malayan Union and the political developments that followed were equally significant in driving nationalist movements and steering the nation toward independence. Academic analysis, like that offered by scholars Brown (2007), Hack (2012), Soomro et al. (2014), Wang (2014), and Welsh (2020) highlights the broader implications of the "stand against Britain's Malayan Union plan of 1946" (Hack, 2012: 157) and subsequent political developments. These events are crucial in understanding the relationship between colonial policies, ethnic politics, and the emergence of nationalist movements in Malaya. As such, these events underscore Malaya's struggle for sovereignty, intertwined with the global geopolitical shifts of the Cold War and Southeast Asia's historical landscape.

This political transformation eventually led to Malaysia gaining its independence from British colonial rule on August 31, 1957. In a significant turn of events during the 2018 elections, the long-standing Barisan Nasional (BN) government was defeated for the first time

since independence. This landmark victory was achieved by the Alliance of Hope (Pakatan Harapan), led by the former Prime Minister, Dr Mahathir Mohamed, symbolising a shift towards what many hoped would be a "New Malaysia" (Noor, 2019; Chin, 2019). However, this period of change was short-lived. Mahathir's unexpected resignation less than two years later led to a shift in power. Muhyiddin Yassin, from the Perikatan Nasional (PN) coalition, assumed the role of Prime Minister, followed by Ismail Yaakob from the BN party (Welsh, 2020). As of the most recent update in 2022, there has been another significant change in Malaysia's political leadership. Dato' Seri Anwar Ibrahim was elected as the Prime Minister in November 2022 (Prime Minister's Office of Malaysia). This development marks yet another shift in leadership, illustrating the dynamic and evolving nature of Malaysian politics. Despite the formation of multiethnic coalitions, disparities in the treatment of ethnic groups continue to persist in Malaysia. The government continues to grant special privileges to the Malay majority, leading to concerns about the equitable constitutional rights of ethnic minorities. Scholars like Shamsul A.B. in *From British to Bumiputera Rule: Local Politics and Rural Development in Peninsular Malaysia* (1986) and Kua Kia Soong in *May 13: Declassified Documents on the Malaysian Riots of 1969* (2007) have explored ethnic relations and policymaking in Malaysia. These books investigate the lasting effects of colonial and postcolonial policies on rural development, highlighting how political divisions in villages are shaped by broader national and international political-economic events, rather than merely by modern electoral systems post-World War II. The administration under Anwar Ibrahim represents the most recent phase in Malaysia's political narrative, reflecting the country's continuous evolution, especially in recent years, and the changing nature of its political governance, and the challenges in navigating a diverse and rapidly changing society.

With the country's convolutions between ethnicity, religion, and national identity, the sociopolitical landscape presents a series of paradoxes that warrant analytical exploration. According to Mahathir, the period preceding independence was characterised by what seemed like ethnic harmony. Nonetheless, this perceived harmony was more accurately an "absence of open conflict" (Mahathir, 2008 [1970]: 18), a condition that suggests superficial unity rather than a genuine and cohesive interethnic bond. This observation points to a deeper paradox in Malaysian society, where the absence of visible conflict might be mistaken for harmony, concealing underlying tensions. However, this apparent tranquillity may merely be a façade, obscuring latent frictions and differences that have not been openly addressed or reconciled. In *The Importance of Cognitive Competency in Interethnic Relations Among the Youth* (2010),

Yee and Wong's perspective on tolerance further elucidates this paradox. They argue that tolerance in Malaysia involves consciously discarding "biased beliefs and the valuing of others irrespective of their colour or creed" (2010: 204). This situation implies a societal dynamic where different ethnic groups coexist without necessarily engaging in meaningful interactions or developing deep mutual understanding and respect. Such a scenario is precarious, as it allows underlying tensions to persist and potentially escalate under certain circumstances, as evidenced by historical events like the 1969 riots. This analysis considers the importance of distinguishing between mere tolerance or absence of conflict and the active cultivation of genuine interethnic cohesion for the development of a more unified society.

The post-independence era has seen Malaysia grappling with issues of ethnic inequality and social classification, leading to what can be described as a contradictory emergence of a "xenophobic multi-ethnic nation" (Francis-Granger, 2023: 93). This phrase encapsulates a striking contradiction inherent in the Malaysian sociopolitical landscape: a country embodied by its ethnic diversity, yet simultaneously exhibiting signs of xenophobia or distrust towards the very elements that constitute its diversity. This contradiction is not just an anomaly but a reflection of deep-rooted issues of ethnic inequality and social classification that have persisted in the country, due to "an empire of hybrid components, conflicting traditions, and unsettled boundaries between races and peoples: a source of constant unease as well extraordinary energy", which Darwin calls "crucially, an unfinished empire" (preface xii, 2012). The institutionalisation of Malay indigenous status, a policy designed to uplift the majority Malay population, and the establishment of vernacular schools, which cater to specific ethnic groups, have inadvertently contributed to this perplexing situation. These policies, while intended to address historical imbalances and preserve ethnocultural identities, have also led to societal segregation, reinforcing ethnic divisions rather than promoting integration. This form of segregation along ethnic lines has resulted in a society where different ethnic groups exist in parallel, often with limited interaction and understanding of each other's cultural and social realities, aligning with Furnivall's observation on such phenomena. The result is "a plural society, with different sections of the community living side by side, but separately, within the same political unit" (Furnivall, 1948: 304) that, paradoxically, harbours fear and distrust of its inherent diversity. This situation poses significant challenges for national unity and social cohesion, as it creates an environment where stereotypes and prejudices can thrive, potentially leading to tension and conflict.

Simon During explores Louis Althusser in *The Cultural Studies Reader*:

> [E]ach individual [is] "unique" and "free" […] individuals can be sucked into ideology so easily because it helps them make sense of the world, to enter the "symbolic order" and ascribe power to themselves. […] Dominant social values are internalized through this kind of identification. (2010: 5)

Althusser's concepts are further explored by Caryn Lim on "ethnic identity" and "interpellation"[8] applying them to the Malaysian context, which provides a critical lens for understanding these phenomena. Lim, in her 2010 work, *Locating 'Mixed' Identities in a Racialized Society*, employs these theoretical concepts to reassess how the labels "Malays", "Chinese", and "Indians" in Malaysia acquired their meanings and influence through ideological institutions (in David *et al.*, 2010: 15; Francis-Granger, 2023). This approach offers an insightful examination of how these ethnic identifiers are not merely neutral or descriptive terms, but are imbued with significant connotations that actively shape the self-perception of individuals as well as their perception of others within these groups. Her analysis delves into how such labels, reinforced by societal and institutional narratives, contribute to the formation of individual and collective identities in the Malaysian context. Building on Lim's insights, culturalist Hall's concept of "effective suturing of a subject to a subject-position" in *Who needs 'Identity'?*, extends this understanding by illustrating how individuals are not just passively labelled but become actively invested in the identities ascribed to them through the process of interpellation (2000: 19). This investment significantly shapes their self-identification and the manner in which they interact with others, deeply influencing the social fabric of Malaysian society. This process of interpellation and identification in Malaysia has, paradoxically, led to segregation rather than unity in its multiethnic society (Francis-Granger, 2023). Such polarisations have been an important factor in the "underrepresentation" and marginalisation of ethnic minorities (Francis-Granger, 2023: 93). The simmering tensions and disparities rooted in Malaysia's ethnic landscape reached a critical point with the ethnic riots that occurred on May 13, 1969 in Kuala Lumpur. This event, unfolding in the aftermath of a contentious election, starkly highlighted the deep-seated ethnic divisions ingrained within the nation.

[8] Althusser introduces the concept of "interpellation" or "hailing", framing these terms as mechanisms that effectively recruit individuals into becoming subjects, explaining that it involves a specific operation that transforms an individual's identity and role within a society. (*Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses*, 1971: 40).

The riots of May 13, 1969, and NEP

The May 1969 riots in Malaysia marked a historic moment in the country's history, deeply embedded in its complex ethnic composition and colonial legacy. Prior to independence, Malaysia's ethnic diversity was significantly shaped by British colonial policies, as previously established. This period laid the groundwork for future ethnic relations and economic disparities and provides the historical context of ethnic relations in Malaysia during and after the colonial era, a subject thoroughly examined in several comprehensive works (Mahathir, 2008 [1970]; Hooker, 2003; Holst, 2012; Saw, 2015; Ratnam, 2019; Cheu, 2020). Cheu compares "the fermentation of ethnic conflict" with other countries in *Ethnicity and ethnic relations in multi-ethnic Malaysia*:

> […] the most common ones relate to the conflict between 'Black' and 'White' in the United States of America, Anglophone and Francophone in Canada, Catholic and Protestant in Northern Ireland, Greek and Turk in Cyprus, Wallen and Fleming in Belgium, Bengali and non-Bengali in Pakistan. […] The separation of Singapore from Malaysia in 1965 and the May 13 political riots in 1969 were in essence, manifestations of such a conflict. In fact, we would add that, in any poly-ethnic society, ethnicity is very much a fact of life. Under such circumstances, ethnicity will inevitably remain as long as groups continue to identify themselves as different from one another. (2020: 26)

The immediate trigger for the May 13 riots, as identified by scholars Kua in *Racial conflict in Malaysia: against the official history* (2007) and Holst (2012), was the tension following the 1969 general election. The narrow victory of the Alliance coalition, primarily supported by Malays, and the significant gains by opposition parties with non-Malay backing in key states, sparked unrest. This period is a focal point in studies on electoral politics in multiethnic societies, highlighting how political competition has the potential to exacerbate ethnic tensions. The nature and impact of the riots, characterised by widespread violence and the government's declaration of a state of emergency, are critical topics in history and political science studies. The official death toll, property damage, and the extent of social disruption are often cited in discussions about the long-term impact of these events on Malaysian society. These riots not only caused immediate harm but also led to significant changes in the nation's sociopolitical landscape.

In response to the riots, the Malaysian government implemented several affirmative action policies "to reunite and rebuild the country" (Yee & Wong in David *et al*., 2010: 201). Notably, the New Economic Policy (NEP) was created, aiming to address economic disparities faced by the Malay community and for "prosperity for all Malaysians and to ensure that no community would experience a sense of loss and deprivation" (Yee & Wong in David *et al*., 2010: 201). These policies are a significant subject in economic and social policy studies, with analyses available in works by Jomo K.S. (1990, 2004, 2007), Holst (2012), Ratnam (2019) and Cheu (2020). These policies, while intended to rectify economic disparities, also had complex implications for ethnic relations and identity politics in Malaysia, a topic extensively explored in sociopolitical research. In *Identity, Nationhood and State-building in Malaysia* (2019), Ratnam argues that extended suppression tends to merely hide disparities rather than eradicate them, as evidenced by historical patterns.

> Ethnicity remains a potent force in many countries and when a state is weak and unresponsive to the needs and aspirations of its citizens, people will begin to identify themselves less and less with it and increasingly with their tribe, clan or ethnic group. (2019: 40)

The introduction of the NEP occurred at a time when the Malay community was economically disadvantaged compared to other ethnic groups in Malaysia, particularly the Chinese and Indian communities. As detailed by Hooker (2003), the NEP's implementation was a strategic response to the fiscal critiques and requisitions articulated by the Malay community. The policy's objectives included enhancing Malay economic participation, particularly in business sectors, expanding educational opportunities, and promoting a more balanced distribution of wealth. These measures were not only intended to improve the Malays' economic status but also to cultivate national cohesion by diminishing economic imbalances across various ethnic groups. Nevertheless, Ratnam's argument implies that the NEP, while addressing immediate economic grievances, may not have comprehensively tackled the more profound, ingrained issues of ethnic and social disparities. The policy's approach, primarily focused on obscuring or mitigating economic differences, possibly failed to address the root causes of these disparities. Thus, his insight prompts a deeper examination of how such policies, while effective in some respects, might not fully resolve the complex layers of societal issues they aim to address. This leads to a broader discourse on the long-term impacts of these policies. Advocates of affirmative action argue for its necessity in redressing historical injustices and promoting fairness, as explored in research related to social justice and affirmative action. In

contrast, critics contend that ethnic-based policies have perpetuated ethnic divisions and hindered meritocracy and economic development.

Ethnic and religious tensions

The subsequent polarisation between the Malay majority and non-Malay minorities has been exacerbated by the implementation of policies favouring Malay supremacy, known as "*Ketuanan Melayu*" (Lim, 2010: 17). This doctrine endorses Malay predominance in governance and maintains their superior status as the first Malay indigenous people, the *Bumiputeras* (Lim, 2010: 17). Additionally, the escalation of religious tensions within Malaysian society has intensified divisions, particularly between the Islamic community and other religious factions, representing a significant schism challenging efforts to find resolution—"a major divide that has been hard to bridge" (Francis-Granger, 2021: 93). Such a policy promoting "the dominant socio-religious pattern on the Malay Peninsula only since approximately the 18th century" (Hooker, 2003: 21), intended to rectify historical inequalities and the marginalisation of the Malays, has inadvertently contributed to the creation of a hierarchical ethnic structure within Malaysian society. It places the Malay community at a distinct advantage over other ethnic groups, particularly in areas such as education, employment, and political representation. This has led to feelings of ostracism and resentment among the non-Malay populations, exacerbating ethnic divisions. Furthermore, the escalation of religious tensions compounds these ethnic divisions. Malaysia's diverse religious terrain, predominantly Islamic but with significant Buddhist, Christian, Hindu, and other religious communities, has historically been a source of social complexity. The intensification of religious tensions, particularly between the Islamic community and other religious groups, adds another layer to the already complex ethnic dynamics. These religious divides are not just expressions of personal faith but are intertwined with ethnocultural identities and political power structures, making them particularly potent and challenging to navigate. These divides are deeply entrenched and are reinforced by longstanding policies, social norms, and historical grievances.

In the post-independence era of Malaysia, the fusion of Malay identity with the United Malays National Organisation (UMNO) and Islam has led to an intrinsic association of Malay ethnicity with the development of the Islamic faith, as "Malays, UMNO and Islam cannot be separated", a reality discussed by Dahlia Martin in *Redefining 'Malayness': Expectations of Young-Adult Malaysian Muslims* (2010: 32), and further examined by A.B. (1986), Hooker

(2003) and Holst (2012). The Malay population predominantly aligns with an Islamist worldview and agrees with Holst's view that "a person who is constitutionally Malay must be of Islamic faith and can therefore not leave the religion" (2012: 110), suggesting a deep integration of Islamic principles within their sociopolitical framework. Hooker asserts:

> [T]he terms 'Malay' and 'Islam' have become so closely linked that the Malaysian Constitution uses profession of Islam as one of the legal definitions of a Malay. The religion of Islam originated in the Middle East in the 7th century CE and spread to Southeast Asia […]. It is important to note that Islam is a religion which was imported and that local peoples in Southeast Asia accepted it for a variety of reasons and at different periods in their history. (2003: 22)

This alignment stems from a historical intertwining of ethnic and religious identities, where religion forms a core component of their cultural ethos. Conversely, A.B. (1986) notes that there is a notable manifestation of ethnic disparities and tensions, underpinned by distinct ideological orientations among different ethnic groups. The ethnic minorities tend to adopt a secular stance, advocating for the separation of religion from state functions and endorsing a more inclusive, pluralistic approach to the religious diversity within their communities. This setting leads to a conflation of ethnic and religious identities, where these constructs are not only interdependent but also strategically leveraged for varying sociopolitical positions. Such strategic manipulation might serve purposes such as political gain, social control, or the perpetuation of established power dynamics. The resulting overlap between ethnicity and religion is a critical factor in understanding the sociopolitical landscape of a country, significantly influencing social cohesion, political discourse, and policymaking. This intersectionality is particularly evident in the historical context of Malaysia, where ethnic and religious identities have greatly influenced the nation's cultural and political fabric.

The systemic adversities confronting ethnic minorities can be analytically examined through the lens of their perceived status as second-class citizens, a viewpoint discussed earlier and reinforced across various sectors, including education, employment, and land ownership, as previously mentioned. This perspective of marginalisation is not merely anecdotal but is substantiated by empirical observations and scholarly analyses. The chronic underrepresentation of these groups in critical societal spheres is a focal point in works by Kua (2007) and Francis-Granger (2023), who posit that such entrenched institutional disparities

serve to sustain and deepen ethnic divisions. In the realm of education, the failure to implement an integrative approach is particularly pronounced. Tan and Santhiram (2010) and Pillai (2019) provide a critical examination of this issue, illustrating how the educational framework, by segregating children along ethnic and religious lines from an early stage, significantly hinders efforts to foster a "unified education system" (Pillai in Ratnam, 2019: 88). Such segregation not only reflects but also reinforces existing societal divides, suggesting that educational policies and practices can either perpetuate or mitigate ethnic disparities. London-based journalist and author on structural racism, Reni Eddo-Lodge provides a critical perspective on racism in *Why I'm no longer talking to white people about race*, defining discrimination supported by institutional power as "personal prejudice and in a position of negatively affecting other people's life chances" (2018: 2). When contextualised within the Malaysian sociopolitical framework, this definition implies that ethnic minorities encounter systemic hindrances that impede their access to equal life opportunities and employment progression. This predicament is particularly salient for skilled professionals within these minority groups, as the absence of fair treatment grounded in ethnic equality in Malaysia potentially influences their inclination to emigrate. This migration phenomenon has been scrutinised by academics Kim (1998), McIntyre (1998), Benson and O'Reilly (2009, 2016), Koh Sin Yee (2017) and Hahn (2019) who delve into colonial legacies and linguistic affiliations in shaping migration patterns from Malaysia to nations within the Commonwealth. As McIntyre notes:

> The British Empire left an ambiguous legacy. [...] The Commonwealth, which achieved a post-Britannic life of its own enjoyed a considerable renaissance in the 1990s. [...] There are some living cultural continuities. English language became the fastest-growing language in the world - though not 'British-English'. (1998: 131)

Thus, a significant factor in this diasporic shift is the widespread use of a diachronic English variant in Malaysia, serving as a unifying linguistic link that facilitates migration to English-speaking countries. In addition to the English language, the empire's legacies comprise the global spread of sports like "cricket, football, and polo; Anglicised place names; colonial architecture; practices like driving on the left side and wearing wigs in court; parliamentary politics, and organisations like the Boy Scouts" (Jackson, 2013: 113). The Anglican Church, with a significant presence in Africa, highlights the cultural impact of British colonialism (Jackson, 2013). Moreover, urban infrastructure and patterns reflect the empire's lasting influence on global societies, including Canada's development shaped by colonial dynamics

(Jackson, 2013). These factors exemplify the critical role of historical, linguistic, and ethnic factors in shaping a culture of migration among Malaysians, and more specifically among ethnic minorities.

Decolonisation

The demise of the British empire was precipitated by a confluence of three pivotal factors, as outlined by McIntyre. Initially, the rise of "colonial nationalism" significantly challenged the status quo, as colonised nations increasingly demanded self-governance (McIntyre, 1998: 130). Secondly, the evolving landscape of "international relations" rendered the "old style colonialism" obsolete, with global norms shifting towards sovereignty and self-determination (McIntyre, 1998: 130). Lastly, there was a growing recognition within Britain that maintaining the empire was no longer "an asset" but had become a burdensome "liability", reflecting a pragmatic reassessment of its geopolitical strategy and economic interests (McIntyre, 1998: 130). As delineated by McIntyre, these factors that catalysed the British empire's dissolution serve as a microcosm of the broader phenomenon of decolonisation, which is richly layered and varies across different scholars' perspectives and historical narratives. The concept of decolonisation encompasses various dimensions, as expounded by multiple scholars and historical contexts. McIntyre compiles definitions that illustrate decolonisation as not only the act of granting independence to colonies, making them sovereign nations: "'to grant independence to a colony leaving it independent'' and "'to withdraw from a colony leaving it independent'" (1998: 7), but also a broader intellectual and psychological process. This broader view includes the eradication of prejudices and complexes of superiority and inferiority between colonisers and the colonised, as posited by Leopold Senghor, who perceives it as the "'abolition of all prejudice, all superiority complex, in the mind of the colonizer, and also all inferiority complex in the mind of the colonized'" (in McIntyre 1998: 7). John Hargreaves expands on this by interpreting decolonisation as "'the intention to terminate formal political control over specific colonial territories, and to replace it by some new relationship'", whereas Ronald Robinson and Gallagher view "'nationalism, a prime instrument in the process has been the continuation of imperialism by other means'" (in McIntyre 1998: 7). The decolonisation of Malaysia provides a practical illustration of these theories. It was not merely a transfer of political power from British colonial rule, but a complex process influenced by the continuing legacies of empires. As noted by Harari, the legacy of empires, which "ultimately fall", leaves a "rich and enduring" imprint on their former territories, with "[a]lmost all people in the twenty-first century" being "offspring of one empire or another" (2011: 212).

Furthermore, McIntyre's observation of the peaceful natureof British decolonisation presents an intriguing contrast to the decolonisation experiences of other European powers.

> [D]ecolonization has been seen as surprisingly peaceful. Britain was not ejected from its colonies by war, as Germany, Italy and Japan had been. The temporary losses in Southeast Asia were made good, even though prestige has been badly battered. The fall of the Empire was not accompanied by prolonged colonial wars and by domestic political and constitutional upheavals as in France in 1958 and Portugal in 1974. (1998: 130)

He underscores that, unlike Germany, Italy, and Japan, Britain was not forced to relinquish its colonies through warfare. This aspect of British decolonisation is significant because it suggests a different trajectory compared to the violent and tumultuous end of colonial rule seen in other contexts. The reference to "temporary losses in Southeast Asia" likely alludes to situations such as the Japanese occupation during World War II, after which the British were able to reassert control before eventually granting independence. Prior to Malaya's independence, the Japanese occupation was considered significantly more brutal compared with the British system of indirect rule. Historical accounts highlight the harrowing realities of this period—deaths along roadsides, acts of rape, visible brutalisation, and an overwhelming atmosphere of fear and psychological distress. In contrast, the British presence, despite its colonial framework, came to be seen by some as a source of relative stability and protection, offering a semblance of hope amidst the pervasive brutality of the occupation. Regardless of this regained control, McIntyre notes that Britain's "prestige has been badly battered", indicating that the empire's image and influence were significantly diminished, even in the absence of war. The comparison with France and Portugal is particularly noteworthy. France's decolonisation process, especially in Algeria, was marked by intense conflict and had profound domestic repercussions, culminating in significant political and constitutional changes in 1958 (McIntyre, 1998; Choi, 2015). Similarly, Portugal's decolonisation, which followed the Carnation Revolution in 1974, was rapid and occurred alongside considerable internal upheaval (McIntyre, 1998; MacQueen, 2017). In contrast, Britain's empire dissolved more gradually and without the kind of violent struggles or domestic crises that characterised the end of colonial rule in these other European countries. McIntyre suggests that the British approach to decolonisation, which often involved negotiated transitions and legalistic processes, possibly helped avert the kind of violent end that marked decolonisation in other contexts. However, the observation that Britain's prestige was "badly battered" serves as a reminder that the end of the

empire was a complex process that involved a re-evaluation of Britain's role in the world and its self-perception as a global power.

This reflection on Britain's diminished prestige underpins a process not confined to the political realm but extending into the cultural, psychological, and social fabrics of former colonies. In the context of Malaysia, the journey towards becoming a nation-state exemplifies how decolonisation involves much more than the transfer of power, demanding a careful balance of diverse ethnicities, aspirations, and identities (McIntyre, 1998; Darwin, 2012). Mauzy and Milne (1999) and Harding (2012) analysed how the Alliance Party, including UMNO, MCA, and MIC, managed this ethnic balance in the initial stages of independence. Joel S. Kahn and Francis Loh K. W. in *Fragmented Vision: Culture and Politics in Contemporary Malaysia* (1993) further explored the challenges of creating a cohesive Malaysian national identity, focusing on the integration of various ethnocultural identities within a singular national framework. This political evolution was accompanied by substantial economic restructuring, facilitated by the implementation of the NEP. The formation of "Greater Malaysia" in 1963, including Singapore and the Borneo territories, examined in *Creating "Greater Malaysia": Decolonization and the Politics of Merger* (2008) by Tan T. Y., signified the end of decolonisation. This was not just a product of "neo-colonial conspiracy" but was shaped by the decline and assertion of imperial power, with the British government playing a central role in merging Singapore with Malaya and integrating the northern Borneo territories (Sabah and Sarawak), forging the Malaysian Federation (Tan, 2008: 105). British colonial rule profoundly influenced Malaysia's societal, cultural, and legal frameworks. Postcolonial Malaysia faced the challenge of constructing a modern, sovereign nation-state with a distinct national identity amidst limited institutional capacity and the need to establish clear citizenship norms for populations within and beyond the postcolonial state's borders (Sadiq, 2009).

However, the journey towards a cohesive national unity faced substantial obstacles, particularly in the context of ethnic harmony. The policies perceived as anti-Malay and the political dynamics involving Tunku Abdul Rahman, the People's Action Party (PAP), and Lee Kuan Yew, painted a picture of the deep-seated communal divides within Malaysia (Hooker, 2003). Hooker recounts:

> [T]he policies were anti-Malay and threatening to racial harmony, [and] urged Tunku Abdul Rahman to deal with the PAP and Lee Kuan Yew. Tactics

> to split the PAP failed and Tun Abdul Razak tried but failed to reach a compromise with the Convention. Whatever the public statements of the Convention, its strong PAP component meant that Malays viewed it as a Chinese construction and believed, therefore, that it was unable to represent Malay interests. The racial, or communal divide, proved stronger than the rational force of policies and platforms, even when they were presented in terms of helping all Malaysians. After secret meetings with his cabinet, the Tunku publicly announced the expulsion of Singapore from the federation on 9 August 1965. This was followed by a television appearance by Prime Minister Lee. Genuinely distressed, he explained that although he had worked all his life for a merger of Singapore and the Federation of Malaya, he had become convinced that disagreements were now so serious that to avoid future conflict and violence he believed separation was inevitable. (2003: 225-6)

Singapore's transition to an "independent republic" further exemplified the enduring complexities of postcolonial state relationships (Hooker, 2003: 225-6). The economic disparities and occasional altercations with Malaysia highlighted the ongoing challenges in regional cooperation and understanding. Even after he stepped down as Prime Minister in 1990, Lee's influence persisted, reflecting his "strong influence on domestic as well as regional affairs", as noted by Hooker (2003: 226).

Lee's enduring political influence serves as a backdrop to understanding the broader socioeconomic dynamics in the region, including the implementation of the NEP in Malaysia, which, while aimed at eradicating poverty and correcting ethnic disparities, paradoxically succeeded in certain areas but also accentuated ethnic divisions. Donald Horowitz in *Ethnic Groups in Conflict: Theories, Patterns, and Policies* (2004 [1985]) and Roknifard in *New Economic Policy: Impact of Social and Economic Engineering on Malaysia's Development* (2023) explore Malaysia's shift from a colonial economy, emphasising strategies like industrialisation and diversification. In the postcolonial political landscape, as observed by Khoo B. T. in *Paradoxes of Mahathirism: an intellectual biography of Mahathir Mohamad* (1995), Malaysia tended towards authoritarianism, often prioritising political stability over democratic freedoms. The intertwining of Islam with Malay identity, as discussed by Farish A. Noor in *Islam embedded: the historical development of the Pan-Malaysian Islamic Party PAS, 1951-2003* (2004), has also significantly influenced political dynamics and the consolidation

of Malay support. The shaping of Malaysia's postcolonial identity has been influenced by various political leaders, notably Mahathir Mohamad, known as "Mahathirism" (Khoo, 1995; Noor, 2004). His tenure is distinguished by a fusion of nationalism, capitalism, Islam, populism, and authoritarianism. His governance has profoundly affected Malaysia's political and economic milieu. A fundamental issue of decolonisation and achieving a postcolonial state is the management of identity within the nation-state. During periods of relative stability, such as those experienced by Malaysia and Singapore for much of their postcolonial history, each country has developed its own approach to managing diverse identities. This has involved a combination of authoritarian suppression of certain identities such as "communism" in the past and more recently, "jihadist political Islam", and the successful integration of other major identities at both group and individual levels (Hack, 2012: 162). In contrast, finding a viable model for identity integration remains a significant challenge in other Southeast Asian countries, such as "Myanmar, Indonesia, and to a lesser extent, the Philippines and Thailand" (Hack, 2012: 162). This reflects the ongoing struggle in these nations to balance diverse ethnic, religious, and political identities within a cohesive national framework.

In recent years, Malaysia has experienced a political evolution, marked by growing advocacy for a more inclusive, ethnically transcendent approach. The rise of multiethnic coalitions and proponents of a diverse and equitable Malaysia indicates a shift towards post-ethnical politics. Yet, it is crucial to recognise that the deeply ingrained ethnic issues, stemming from both colonial and postcolonial periods, are not susceptible to quick resolutions. Malaysia's progression towards an inclusive society demands continuous dialogue, empathy, and strategies to address the socioeconomic disparities underpinning ethnic tensions. The path ahead involves enacting policies that champion meritocracy, equal opportunities, and social mobility for all Malaysians, irrespective of ethnic background. This necessitates a reassessment and potential overhaul of governance and societal norms to foster a more equitable landscape, where individual abilities and contributions are valued above ethnicity and inequalities. This process, emanating from Malaysia's decolonisation journey, continues to shape its current and future sociopolitical and economic trajectory, illustrating the ongoing challenges and dynamics within the nation.

2.2.4. Postcolonialism and multiculturalism in Malaysia: Exploring the diverse threads of Malaysian identity

Postcolonialism and ethno-religious segregation

Malaysia's emergence as an independent nation in 1957 marked the cessation of nearly one and a half centuries of British colonial rule, however, the imprint of this era persists significantly in the country's socio-legal and cultural fabric (Hooker, 2003). McIntyre (1998), Hooker (2003), Holst (2012) and Darwin (2012) elucidate the enduring impact of colonialism in various aspects of Malaysian society. McIntyre's research posits that Malaysia's colonial past is central in shaping its foreign policy and the development of its policy architects, symbolising the enduring impact of colonialism on the foreign policy choices of postcolonial nations. Focusing specifically on the era of Tunku Abdul Rahman, Malaysia's first Prime Minister from 1957 to 1970, McIntyre highlights how Malaysia's early post-independence foreign policy, characterised by pro-Western and anti-communist stances, was a direct consequence of its colonial experience. Conversely, Darwin's research delves into the effects of almost two centuries of colonial rule on the prevailing views about Malays, focusing on the Malay population in Malaya and particularly in Singapore. He proposes that the existence of Malays in Singapore is a constructed notion, examining this through two theoretical frameworks: primordialism and constructivism. Additionally, he explores how the British colonial administration employed a primordialist approach in classifying their colonial subjects, a method that subsequently perpetuated negative stereotypes about the Malay community. Cheu's analysis extends this concept:

> Even in countries where religious, linguistic and other socio-cultural contents of each ethnic group have become similar or more and more similar to those of the others, the emotional significance of primordial attachment to the ethnic group still exists. […] The Indonesians, in this case, also include the Balinese, the majority of whom practice Hinduism and are therefore religiously opposed to the Filipino and Indonesian Muslims and Christians. (2020: 27)

These enduring attachments, exemplified by the religious differences between the Balinese Hindus and their Muslim and Christian neighbours, demonstrate the lasting impact of colonial ethnic classifications, maintaining and exacerbating intergroup divisions even after the end of colonial rule.

Malaysia's legal structure represents an amalgamation of indigenous, Islamic, and European legal systems. The indigenous *Adat* justice system, characterised by its diversity, predates the more uniform Islamic and European legal frameworks in the Malay-speaking regions of Southeast Asia, including modern Brunei, Indonesia, and Malaysia. Indeed, prior to British colonisation, traditional customs predominantly governed the legal framework in Malaya. For the Malay population, these customs comprised a blend of indigenous Malay *adat*[9], infused with Hindu and Buddhist influences, and further amplified by principles from the Syafie school of Islamic law (Nagata, 1974). Although Malay *adat* (custom) and Syariah (Islamic law)[10] are distinct entities, they are often perceived as interchangeable within the Malay community, leading to the enforcement of Malay customs in Syariah courts (Bassiouni, 2013). In contrast to Sabah and Sarawak, the Malay Peninsula does not have separate adat courts for handling Malay customs. With the advent of colonial rule, British common law emerged as the primary legal system in Malaya. Consequently, Malay *adat* and Islamic law were reduced to governing personal matters only, and this too was subject to the condition that they did not contradict British principles of fair legal justice. Meanwhile other religions and customs from the non-Malay population were allowed to be observed. This shift marked a significant change in the legal landscape of Malaya, reflecting the influence of colonial rule on indigenous legal systems.

In postcolonial Malaysia and the restructuring of the legal framework, the Malaysian Federal Constitution exemplifies postcolonial contradictions: it upholds the principle of freedom of religion (Article 11)[11] while recognising Islam as the national religion (Article 3)[12]. That is to say, while the Malaysian Constitution *de jure* maintains freedom of religion, *de facto*, it is constrained by various prohibitions and limitations. These disparate provisions reflect the

[9] Adat refers to an array of local customs and traditions that are considered congruent with Islamic principles as practiced by Muslim communities. In Southeast Asia, the notion and interpretations of adat were initially developed within the Islamised Malay-speaking regions. This concept was primarily introduced to differentiate between practices that were non-Islamic and those that aligned with Islamic beliefs. (Nagata, 1974)

[10] Syariah law constitutes a segment of Islamic tradition, grounded in the religion's scriptures, notably the Quran and the Hadith. This religious legal system is an integral component of the Islamic faith. Refer to Bassiouni, 2013.

[11] Article 11. Freedom of religion.
(1) Every person has the right to profess and practise his religion and, subject to Clause (4), to propagate it.
(4) State law and in respect of the Federal Territories of Kuala Lumpur and Labuan, federal law may control or restrict the propagation of any religious doctrine or belief among persons professing the religion of Islam. (*Malaysia: Federal Constitution*, 31 August 1957, https://www.refworld.org/docid/3ae6b5e40.html) [accessed 22 December 2023]

[12] Article 3. Religion of the Federation.
(1) Islam is the religion of the Federation; but other religions may be practised in peace and harmony in any part of the Federation. (*Malaysia: Federal Constitution*, 31 August 1957, https://www.refworld.org/docid/3ae6b5e40.html) [accessed 22 December 2023]

tension between the British-inherited common law system, rooted in judicial precedents, and the Syariah (Islamic) law. This pluralism is further explored by Andaya and Andaya (2001 [1982]), Hooker (2003) and Holst (2012) which offer an in-depth analysis of the parallel existence and interaction of secular common law and religious law within Malaysia's legal framework. Their research highlights the juxtaposition of the British-inherited common law system with Syariah (Islamic) law, and the influence of Malaysia's colonial history and religious customs on its legal system. In reference to sections 2.2.1 and 2.2.2, I delve into the British strategy of ethnic segregation, a cornerstone of their colonial administration, and examine how this policy, aimed at preventing unity among Malay, Chinese, and Indian populations, profoundly influenced Malaysia's sociopolitical landscape. This approach, more than a mere administrative strategy, was instrumental in maintaining colonial dominance by fragmenting potential collective resistance. The lasting effects of these policies are evident in contemporary Malaysian society, where ethnic relations are still shaped by these historically established divisions. Furthermore, the broader colonial impact on Malaysia, encompassing the Portuguese, Dutch, and Japanese periods, is integral to understanding its current sociocultural landscape. Each colonial era contributed distinct influences, with the British period being particularly transformative. This period's impact, including the formation of Eurasian communities, is explored by Andaya and Andaya (2001 [1982]) and Pillai, P. in *Yearning to belong: Malaysia's Indian Muslims, Chitties, Portuguese Eurasians, Peranakan Chinese, and Baweanese* (2015), who provide a comprehensive overview of the cultural and social changes during colonial times. Renowned historian and sociologist Syed Hussein Alatas, in his seminal work *The Myth of the Lazy Native* (1977), critiques the colonial construction of ethnic stereotypes in Malaysia, the Philippines, and Indonesia for four centuries (16th - 20th), further illuminating the profound societal implications of colonial rule. He explores its role in colonial capitalism, a system marked by ethnic nuances and the alleged inertia of natives as a construct of colonial capitalism aimed at undermining their humanity to ensure subordination. Alatas's influential work not only demonstrates the persistent impact of these colonial perceptions post-independence but also provides critical analysis on the continuation of ethnic ideologies and their contemporary manifestations in Malaysian society.

In the context of Malaysia's postcolonial ethnic mosaic, where Islam is often an integral marker of ethnic identity, the nation is actively engaged in systematic efforts to integrate diverse legal principles across various ethnic groups. In contrast to Singapore, Malaysia legally favours its Malay ethno-religious group over other citizens. This preferential treatment has

been in place since the early 1970s, primarily through affirmative action initiatives under the New Economic Policy (NEP). Institutionalised racism, as defined by Camara Jones in *Levels of Racism: A Theoretic Framework and a Gardener's Tale* (2000) is a system in which societal resources, services, and opportunities are distributed unevenly based on race. This form of racism, as argued by David Williams in *Race, Socioeconomic Status, and Health: The Added Effects of Racism and Discrimination* (1999), has detrimental effects on educational attainment, job opportunities, and the attainment of higher socioeconomic status. The works of both these researchers demonstrate the pervasive and harmful effects of institutionalised racism. This scenario is indicative of a legal pluralism that echoes the intricate socio-legal and cultural fabric shaped significantly by Malaysia's colonial legacy. It is imperative, however, to acknowledge that despite Islam being the state religion, Malaysia functions not as a theocratic Islamic state but under the supremacy of the Federal Constitution. From a macro-level perspective, amidst these legal and cultural complexities, Malaysia has adeptly maintained societal cohesion and stability. This achievement has had a positive ripple effect on its economic trajectory and overall quality of life. It exemplifies the country's commitment to striking an equilibrium between the enduring vestiges of colonial influence and elements of its ethno-religious traditions.

Multiculturalism

The 1971 National Culture Policy of Malaysia, a strategic initiative to foster harmony and understanding among its diverse population, has been a subject of intense debate and political discourse since its inception. This policy, which significantly influences the country's sociocultural landscape, emphasises Malay traditions and Islamic elements, aiming to forge a unified national identity. This aspect has been extensively analysed for its impact on cultural assimilation and preservation. The policy's implementation, particularly from the late 1980s, involved direct governmental intervention in cultural affairs, a move that has been met with resistance from various non-Malay communities who felt their cultural freedoms were being undermined (A.B., 1986; Embong, 2002; Kuah *et al*., 2021). Notable among these responses were the resolutions passed by the Chinese guilds and associations in March 1983, and similar memoranda submitted by prominent Indian cultural, social, and religious groups in April 1984, as cited by Kahn and Loh (1992). These documents criticised the government's approach as overly Malay-centric and undemocratic, calling for the establishment of a more inclusive, multiethnic, and democratic national culture policy in Malaysia's multiethnic identity.

Additionally, government initiatives like the Vision School, the Student Integration Plan for Unity, and Civic and Citizenship Education programmes are integral to this endeavour (Kahn & Loh, 1992; Malakolunthu & Rengasamy, 2012; Kuah *et al*., 2021). The success of these policies is contingent upon a dedicated effort to integrate inclusivity and multiculturalism within the national educational agenda, ensuring that these efforts effectively contribute to Malaysia's cultural mosaic. In a broader dimension of the discussion, a critical aspect of the discourse on Malaysian multiculturalism is the differential rights and privileges accorded to various ethnic groups. This complexity in ethnicity, class and societal privileges in a multicultural society is articulated by Kua (2007) and Embong in *Malaysia as a Multicultural Society* (2002), who examine the sociopolitical implications of these varied rights. Further expanding this discourse, in *Pluralistic Japan: Coming to terms with racial and ethnic diversity* (2003), McCormack provides a critique of multiculturalism, particularly on the issue that such policies frequently depend on homogenised and singular historical narratives. This critique suggests that multiculturalism, rather than being a purely inclusive and unifying framework, can sometimes serve specific political agendas. Applying this perspective to Malaysia, McCormack implies that the nation's multicultural policies might not be entirely neutral or equitable. Instead, they could be shaped by underlying political motives, aiming to craft a particular national identity or historical narrative that supports certain political objectives. This view points to the difficulty of implementing multiculturalism in a way that genuinely respects and represents the diversity of a nation's populace, suggesting that Malaysia's approach to multiculturalism could be influenced by a desire to control or guide the nation's sociopolitical direction under the guise of unity and inclusivity. Such a critique raises questions about the real intentions behind these policies, implying that they could be a strategic tool for authorities to maintain power and control.

Despite the official narrative of multicultural harmony, Malaysia experiences real challenges related to segregation and integration. Instances of segregation, whether intentional or systemic, are observed in various societal spheres such as residential areas, schools, and workplaces. The effects of such segregation on social cohesion and the mutual understanding among different ethnic and social groups are profound. Hefner in *The Politics of Multiculturalism* (2001) explores the complexities of social integration in Malaysia, Singapore and Indonesia, analysing the postcolonial period, which has involved the complex task of building a unified national identity from diverse populations, alongside pursuing economic advancement. These three adjacent nations each possess unique ethnic compositions, distinct

experiences under British and Dutch colonial rule, and have established varying constitutional bases as newly formed nations. In his insightful introduction, Hefner utilises his studies on civil society and market participation to critically analyse Furnivall's theory of a plural society shaped by colonial histories. He offers insightful historical and sociological perspectives, exploring the foundational reasons behind his research. Hefner seeks to understand whether the governmental efforts are towards "build[ing] a new, 'post-plural societies' culture of universal citizenship or are merely putting a new face on old segregations" (2001: 10). In addition, the work of Selvadurai *et al*. in *Debating education for nation building in Malaysia: National school persistence or vernacular school resistance?* (2015) examines the grassroots and community-led efforts to bridge ethnic divides, providing a thorough comprehension of the successes and challenges faced in achieving genuine integration through education.

Will Kymlicka's theoretical framework on multiculturalism and minority rights in *Multicultural Citizenship: A Liberal Theory of Minority Rights* (1995) can be applied to the Malaysian context to further harness a layer of understanding. His conceptualisation of multiculturalism, defined as a sociopolitical project that seeks to redefine the relationship between ethnocultural minorities and the state through the adoption of new laws, policies, or institutions, finds resonance in Malaysia's efforts to navigate its multicultural reality. As mentioned above, the Malaysian government has implemented a range of policies and legal provisions designed to address the rights and interests of its diverse ethnic and cultural communities, aligning with the normative dimensions of Kymlicka's key principle of multiculturalism. He argues that the rights of minorities, particularly the right to preserve and express unique cultural identities, are not only consistent with the values of liberal democracies but are fundamental to them. He proposes that acknowledging and safeguarding these rights is a step towards fostering a society that is more inclusive, fair, and democratic. While theoretical insights into multicultural policies provide a crucial analytical lens, their practical application in Malaysia requires an assessment of the country's unique historical, social, and political aspects to effectively address its specific challenges and attributes. Consequently, while Kymlicka's framework provides a foundational perspective, it may require supplementary considerations to comprehensively address Malaysia's multicultural landscape. The juxtaposition of theoretical frameworks with on-the-ground realities in Malaysia offers a comprehensive approach to understanding and addressing the issues of multicultural harmony, segregation, and integration.

Race/ethnicity and socioeconomic status

Race/ethnic stratification in Malaysia has consistently been the central focus of scholarly investigations and public discourse concerning Malaysia's internal political dynamics, its socioeconomic progress, and its societal composition. Within the context of multiculturalism, the examination of race/ethnicity and socioeconomic intersectionality in Malaysia, as analysed from various scholarly perspectives, constructs a multidimensional portrayal of Malaysian society that shapes the identities and lived experiences of its populace. This connection is profoundly interwoven into the legal, societal, and economic structure of the nation. This integration extends beyond mere individual self-identification and is deeply entrenched within societal systems and legal frameworks. As alluded to previously, race/ethnic identity in Malaysia carries significant weight in both personal and collective identity, exerting influence over socioeconomic status, educational opportunities, employment opportunities, and political representation. In *Conceptualizing and Categorizing Race and Ethnicity in Health Services Research* (2005), Marvella E. Ford and P. Adam Kelly confirm that race encompasses aspects of individual and collective identity, along with biological markers that are typically recognised. On the other hand, ethnicity is primarily a sociopolitical construct, denoting the commonality of culture, which includes shared origins, psychological traits and attitudes, language, religion, and cultural traditions. Thus, ethnicity pertains to cultural identification, which is dynamic and subject to change over time. The link between race/ethnicity and socioeconomic factors generates stratifications of advantage and disadvantage within Malaysian society.

Numerous scholars have explored this subject matter. For instance, Stewart and Goldfarb in *Historical trends in the study of diverse families* (2007) contribute to the comprehension of 'race' and 'ethnicity', making a distinction between the superficial biological aspect of race, primarily manifested through skin colour, and the deeper cultural and historical foundations of ethnicity. On the same page as Giddens and Suttons (2021), they contend that ethnicity is characterised by a shared lineage and historical background among the group, evolving in unison with common values, and giving rise to distinct customs that symbolise the uniqueness of their identity. In *Transforming Malaysia: Dominant and Competing Paradigms* (2014), Milner *et al*. expand upon this viewpoint by considering these constructs as abstract and flexible in the "race paradigm" shaped by "the dominant societal paradigm of social and political life" (2014: 1), taking into account historical circumstances. In this context, they view race or ethnicity as abstract terms within a society, grouping individuals who share similar

racial attitudes and identities that originated in a particular place and time. These perspectives point to the dynamic state of racial and ethnic identities in Malaysia, with the conclusion that "the task of traversing the 'crossroads' becomes at least in part an ideological one" (2014: 10). Beforehand, Milner in Holst (2012) argues:

> [T]he concept of a Malay race was a consciously "imagined community" developed in the context of British colonial rule and under the influence of a manifestation of race as a central pillar of British thinking at that time. To make the nationalist ideology more appealing the concept of a Malay race was formulated in a way that paralleled the sultanate and other community and identity systems.

Similarly, Hooker contends:

> It should be understood, however, that the category 'Malay' is a very fluid one, *not* defined by physical characteristics, but by language, dress, customs and, most importantly, by the profession of Islam. None of these characteristics is innate, in the sense that an individual is born with them. Each can be adopted and it is now recognised that it is possible to 'become' a Malay by assuming these characteristics. It is therefore, to some extent, a matter of choice as to whether groups and individuals wish to identify themselves as 'Malays' and to accept the consequences of being seen as 'Malay'. In contemporary Malaysia, there are some social and financial benefits from being thus categorised and some individuals have 'become' Malay to gain access to them. (2003: 21-22)

Likewise, Stewart and Goldfarb emphasise the superficiality of race compared to the deeper cultural and historical dimensions of ethnicity, a viewpoint shared by Milner and Milner *et al*., who see these attributes as abstract constructs shaped by specific contexts and evolving over time in response to societal changes. Milner, Hooker, and Stewart and Goldfarb collectively agree on the constructed nature of racial and ethnic identities, particularly in the Malaysian context. Milner illuminates how the British colonial era's emphasis on race influenced the strategic crafting of a 'Malay race' identity, aligning it with local governance and societal frameworks to foster nationalism. Hooker further elaborates that 'Malay' identity in Malaysia transcends physical traits, being defined by cultural practices, language, and religion, notably Islam. This fluidity suggests that Malay identity can be adopted, reflecting individual or group

choices influenced by the sociopolitical incentives associated with this identity. Stewart and Goldfarb's assertion that race is superficial compared to the profound cultural and historical facets of ethnicity aligns with Milner's and Hooker's observations, reinforcing the idea that ethnic identities are not fixed but are continually reshaped by historical contexts and societal dynamics.

To consolidate these views, Mahathir's observations (2008 [1970]) on the physical and cultural segregation of Malays, Chinese, and Indians in Malaysia add depth to this discourse. His comments on the heightened awareness of race among Malaysians demonstrate a broader Asian societal tendency. Mahathir points out:

> Malaysians are more conscious about race than most people, for Malaysians are Asians, and Asians everywhere cling to race much more than Europeans or Africans. (2008 [1970]: 220)

This statement seems to oversimplify a complex issue. As demonstrated scientifically by Ford and Kelly, "race […] is based on phenotypic genetic expression rather than being a biological construct" (2005: 1659). The assertion that Asians, as a whole, are more racially and ethnically conscious than Europeans or Africans overlooks the vast diversity within these continents. Asia, being extremely diverse in cultures, languages, and histories, does not lend itself to such broad generalisations. Similarly, Europe and Africa have their own complex histories and contemporary issues with race and ethnicity. Moreover, the idea of intrinsic behavioural traits linked to race is not supported by modern genetics, as alluded to by Stewart and Goldfarb (2007) and Milner *et al.* (2014), which demonstrate greater genetic diversity within racial groups than between them. Racial attitudes are shaped more by sociopolitical factors, cultural contexts, and individual experiences rather than inherent characteristics of a particular racial or ethnic group. Therefore, Mahathir's statement, while reflecting a viewpoint on racial attitudes in Malaysia, oversimplifies the convoluted nature of race perception and consciousness across different societies. The attachment to race in Malaysia is indeed a crucial factor in how societal interactions are shaped, but this phenomenon cannot be uniformly applied to all Asians, Europeans, or Africans. In tandem with Ford and Kelly, Didier Lassalle sheds light on his understanding of the term race in *L'integration au Royaume-Uni : Réussites et limites du multiculturalisme*:

> The term "race" is linked to a purely phenotypic view of human classification rooted in the 1950s, illustrated by the common expression

> "people of colour" [...] based on the "racialised" opposition between the indigenous white majority and the newcomers from the former colonies of the Empire: foreigners, others, easily identifiable by their obvious physical characteristics.[13] (*my translation*) (2009: 121-122)

Lassalle's understanding is exemplified in the evolution of racial and ethnic identity terminologies in Britain. For example, in the early 1980s, those with West Indian heritage in Britain advocated for adopting the term "black British" instead of British. This shift is attributed to the growing number of individuals with West Indian roots who were born in Britain (Ford & Kelly, 2005). The heightened importance of ethnicity in shaping one's identity accentuated disparities in social and economic conditions between individuals previously referred to as "West Indian" (now termed African Caribbean or "Black") and "Asian" communities (Brown, 1984; Ford & Kelly, 2005).

Nonetheless, to prove his point, Mahathir correlates physical attributes to a broader dimension.

> The three races have practically nothing in common, physiognomy, language, culture and religion differ, how is any one race going to forget race when each is in fact physically separated from the other? Even in neighbourhoods, they live apart - the Chinese in the towns, the Malays in the *kampongs* (villages) and the Indians on the estates. (Mahathir, 2008 [1970]: 220-221).

His statement requires a nuanced analysis. The emphasis on physical appearance (physiognomy) to distinguish races overlooks the fact that there is more genetic variation within racial groups than between them. The idea of races being "physically separated" is more a social perception than a biological fact. The differences in language, culture, and religion mentioned by Mahathir are significant but are not insurmountable barriers. Cheu's argument could be enlightening:

> [C]ertain physical and socio-cultural traits set them apart from one another. These can be distinguished by: (i) the distinctive physical traits each of these

[13] Original text: « Le terme « race » est lié à une vision purement phénotypique de la classification humaine ancrée dans les années cinquante, et illustrée par l'expression commune « personnes de couleur » [...] sur l'opposition « racialisée » entre la majorité blanche autochtone et les nouveaux arrivants originaires des anciennes colonies de l'Empire : les étrangers, les autres, facilement reconnaissables par leurs caractéristiques physiques évidentes. »

> groups possesses; (ii) the dialect or mother tongue each of these groups speaks; and (iii) the social norms, customs, folkways, mores, religious values, and other socio-cultural traditions each of these groups follows and which guide and characterize its lifeway. […] Each of these aspects has to be viewed in all its ramifications; otherwise, it loses its significance as an aspect of ethnic life. A Malay who attends Chinese school may speak Chinese, acquire a Chinese name, or even look Chinese, but he may not follow the Chinese custom or folkways. A Chinese or an Indian Muslim may speak Malay and follow the Malay custom, but neither may look 'Malay'. Certain physical features of the Chinese, Indian and Malay may be different, but they do not themselves constitute differences in race, since all of these physical features can be found in the gene-pools of all the ethnic groups concerned. (2020: 22-23)

The distinct physical traits, languages, and sociocultural practices that differentiate ethnic groups reflect historical and social developments, and how these characteristics can evolve over time through intercultural interactions. Regarding residential patterns, while it is true that different racial groups may live in distinct areas, this is often a result of socioeconomic factors, historical circumstances (British's 'divide and rule' administrative strategy), and personal preferences (over time) rather than innate differences. Such segregation can reinforce perceived differences, but it is not indicative of an inherent separation. Hooker's analysis reveals how British colonial strategies, by intensifying ethnic divisions and steering the Malay population towards economically limiting agricultural activities, laid the groundwork for the persistent economic disparities and societal stratification in Malaysia.

> Malays believed British policies had contributed to the poverty and backwardness of the Malays and they blamed the large-scale immigration of Chinese and Indian workers into the country for taking jobs from the local population. They did not note a further fact which became obvious only much later—that by encouraging Malays to cultivate rice as a livelihood, the British were restricting them to the least lucrative of pursuits and one which tied them to a rural and restricted economic existence. (2003: 174)

This historical context of orchestrated economic marginalisation and induced labour competition sets the stage for the task of cultivating a cohesive cultural identity in Malaysia's

pluralistic society. It also provides a backdrop to Mahathir's thesis which captures observable social patterns but simplifies the elaborate aspects of race. This aspect is further explored by Hirschman (1986) who examines the geographical and social segregation of ethnic groups in Malaysia and its impact on societal dynamics, paralleling Mahathir's observations on the physical and cultural segregation among the main races in Malaysia, and the challenges in transcending racial boundaries. This segregation is both social and geographical, with different races predominantly residing in separate areas, maintaining distinct physiognomies, languages, cultures, and religions. An alignment with what segregation entails is observed in Ted Cantle's understanding of the term in Britain, that it "denotes an area […] dominated by one group […] effectively mono-cultural. […] 'self-segregation' […] communities have preferred to live in separate areas - in other words, the segregation is 'voluntary', describing it as "'lack of contact'", "monoculturalism" and "'parallel lives'" (in Race, 2015: 46-7). Seen this way, a sense of 'otherness' is emphasised by Mahathir's comment on the heightened race consciousness in Malaysian society.

According to Holst:

> Defining what and who is Malaysian is an important field in the country's ethnicized identity politics and often takes place in relation to what constitutes a Malay alongside notions of ethnic purity. (2012: 125)

Holst explores Malaysia's identity politics with the crucial task of delineating 'Malaysian' and 'Malay' in discussions on "ethnic purity" and identity. This exploration is further deepened by A.B. (1986), who examines the occasional tension between these identities within the context of ethnically inclined policies like the *Bumiputera*, shedding light on the delicate differentiation between 'Malayness' and 'Malaysianness'. The distinction between Malayness and Malaysianness adds another layer to this discourse. Gomez and Jomo discuss the socioeconomic implications of Malaysia's policy that privileges Malays and other indigenous groups in *Malaysia's Political Economy: Politics, Patronage and Profits* (1999). This policy is further analysed in relation to the distinction between Malayness and Malaysianness, adding an additional dimension to the discourse. Malayness is defined as the ethnic identity of the Malay people, while Malaysianness represents a broader national identity that encompasses all citizens of Malaysia. This distinction becomes particularly salient in the context of national policies like the *Bumiputera*, which privileges Malays and other indigenous groups over the non-Malay minority groups. The coexistence and sometimes conflictual phenomenon of these

identities within individuals and society reflect the complexities of navigating ethnic and national identities in a multiethnic state. Furthermore, the work of Kua (2007) provides an insightful critique of Malaysia's ethnic policies and their impact on social stratification and class dynamics—a result that culminated in the May 1969 riots. He concludes:

> [T]he ruling political elite of Malaysia continues to invoke the spectre of racial conflict to justify its own control of power, its use of censorship and detention without trial, and the 'special privileges' it accords to its own section of society, [and] demands that the country's history [is] re-examined and that the role of [the] state itself in fostering racial conflict is acknowledged. (2007: 51)

In synthesising these scholarly works, it is observed that the concepts of race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status in Malaysia are fluid and continuously reshaped by historical influences, government policies, and societal shifts. While Malaysia strives to cultivate an equitable multicultural society, understanding the constructed nature of race and the sociopolitical factors at play helps at comprehending and improving racial and ethnic relations. Despite the evolution of Malaysianness beyond rigid racial boundaries, the official narrative still lags in fully embracing these significant societal shifts. As Cheu elucidates:

> In the 'global' system of ideology, State places emphasis on the creation of a 'Malaysian Malaysia' (a Nation State) rather than a 'Malay Malaysia' (a Malay State). It commits itself to the creation of a united nation based on the fundamental principles of state-based nationality. As long as these ideological incongruity and incompatibility exist, they will be inimical to the conditions and pre-requisites for the establishment of a truly united Malaysia. (2020: 54)

This analysis points out the tension in Malaysia's nation-building between a "'Malaysian Malaysia'" and a "'Malay Malaysia'", where this ideological divide complicates the creation of a unified national identity through a sense of Malaysianness. According to Cheu, overcoming these challenges requires reconciling diverse ethnic interests and fostering a shared sense of Malaysian identity, balancing cultural respect with collective national unity.

Race vs. Ethnicity

Within the framework of this research, the shift from a primary emphasis on race to a heightened focus on ethnicity is motivated by the unique sociocultural dynamics prevalent in Malaysia. This nation boasts a diverse populace comprised of various ethnic groups, including Malays, Chinese, Indians, Indigenous peoples, and the mixed-ethnic group, among others, each with historical ties to disparate countries and regions. However, due to historical contingencies, these "ethnic Chinese and third- and fourth-generational" groups as well as "many as seven to eight generations under the 'non-bumiputera' category" have come to consider Malaysia as their home (Gabriel, 2015: 792; Cheu, 2020: 25). A pivotal factor driving this transition is the cultivation of a shared sense of community and belonging among these distinct ethnic groups in the Malaysian context. Despite their disparate origins, these communities have coexisted in Malaysia for generations, contributing to the composition of the nation's social fabric. This shared historical experience has given rise to a collective sense of imagined community rooted in their respective ethnic heritages. Nonetheless, this connection has evolved over time. Anderson (1986), as discussed by Bryant in *The Nations of Britain* (2006) posits that "[t]he very idea of an imagined community reflects a desire for community in modern life where it is otherwise mostly absent (2006: 28). Furthermore, he stresses that:

> [I]ndividuals have their own hierarchies even if they seldom articulate them as such, but they also share identities by engaging with and reworking the constructions and representations they encounter. In giving voice [to] their identities they both take account of others and represent themselves to others. Nations are communities of sentiment, not collections of solipsists. (2006: 28)

By expressing their identities, they acknowledge that shared identities are constructed through interaction and mutual recognition, rather than being mere aggregates of isolated individuals.

This acknowledgment serves as a bridge to the discussion on race, traditionally tethered to biological or genetic attributes used to categorise individuals or groups based on physical characteristics (Furnivall, 1948; Hirschman, 1986; Ford & Kelly, 2005; Stewart & Goldfarb, 2007; Milner *et al.* 2014). However, in Malaysia, the notion of race has undergone a transformative process influenced by historical, cultural, and social factors. The concept of race has increasingly been shaped by social constructs rather than solely relying on biological distinctions. Consequently, specific aspects of racial identity have evolved and are now more

aptly described as ethnicities, as Gabriel extrapolates in *The meaning of race in Malaysia: Colonial, post-colonial and possible new conjunctures* (2015):

> [T]he discourse of ethnicity also functions as a system of socio-economic and cultural power around which have been constructed practices of negative differentiation, hierarchy and exclusion." (2015: 791)

This analysis underlines the importance of considering ethnicity within the broader context of social power relations and the potential for perpetuating inequality and exclusion, inviting us to critically examine how ethnic identities are constructed and utilised within societal structures. Malaysian scholars have recognised this evolving landscape within Malaysian society and have presented a conceptual framework that emphasises ethnicity rather than race (Gabriel, 2015; Ratnam, 2019). Cheu adds:

> These confounding factors become more intense when we attempt to identify the present-day Malaysians of Chinese and Indian descent as "Chinese" and "Indians" as though they were non-Malaysians who have been transported from mainland China and India. In actual fact, a Malay by descent may not necessarily speak Malay, as the Malays in Cape Town, South Africa, represent. A Chinese or an Indian Malaysian may not necessarily speak or write Chinese or Tamil (or any of the other Indian languages) as the Chinese and Indian Peranakan in the former Straits Settlements testify. Instead, they speak Malay as the lingua franca, which forms one of the "primordial" bases for the formation of Malay identity. Similarly, in Malaysia, a Muslim may not necessarily be an Arab, or an Arab a Moslem in the Middle East. A Moslem in Malaysia could be a Malay, a Chinese, an Indian or any member of a Malaysian ethnic group. An Arab, an Indian, or their "mixed breed" with the Malay could identify themselves as Malay by way of Islam or Islamic name although their physical features may not necessarily correlate with those of the Malay. (2020: 21)

This framework acknowledges the interaction between historical migration patterns, cultural influences, and social interactions that have contributed to the emergence of distinct ethnic identities among the various ethnic groups in Malaysia. By concentrating on ethnicity, researchers such as myself aim to provide a more accurate representation of the convoluted nature of identity in Malaysia.

In light of this, this research adopts a perspective that acknowledges the transformation of racial identities into ethnic identities within the Malaysian context. Its objective is to investigate how these ethnic identities have been constructed, negotiated, and perceived by both individuals and communities. This endeavour aims to illuminate historical narratives, cultural dynamics, and social realities within Malaysia.

A mosaic of identity: Navigating ethnic diversity and national consciousness

The fabric of Malaysian ethnic and cultural identity, shaped by history, society, and politics, manifests in its diverse language, cuisine, festivals, and arts. A major challenge lies in preserving a unified national identity while celebrating this multicultural heritage and promoting inclusiveness, as Holst enlightens:

> For the Malaysian scenario, this helps to understand the power that ethnic group identifiers may have on people, such as being labeled Malay or Chinese, because these identifiers have a real impact on people's lives and it would be wrong to ignore them. (2012: 29)

Holst emphasises the importance of recognising ethnic identifiers like Malay or Chinese, which significantly influence individuals' lives and societal dynamics. Acknowledging the impact of these labels is essential for advancing inclusivity and equity in Malaysia's diverse society. The profound impact of ethnic labels is a crucial step towards addressing the identity crises faced by individuals of mixed heritage in Malaysia, who often face an identity crisis, struggling to reconcile different aspects of their heritage. This issue is stressed in Tan and Santhiram (2010) and Pillai (2015), centring on the internal conflict of reconciling various aspects of one's heritage, especially when exposure to all facets is limited. Interethnic marriages in Malaysia enrich the nation's cultural mosaic by blending traditions and fostering a deeper understanding across diverse ethnic and cultural backgrounds. Historically and in contemporary times, such unions have significantly contributed to Malaysia's cultural diversity. These marriages, often exogamous, facilitate cultural exchange and blend traditions, influencing sociocultural norms and tolerance (Pillai, 2015). In the mixed-ethnic population in Malaysia, which reflects the multicultural and multiethnic nature of the country, exogamous marriages are increasingly common. It is, as a result, commonplace to encounter Malaysians with a mixed-ethnic background, reflecting the historical and ongoing interactions among various communities in Malaysia. Further exploring the social dynamics, the acceptance of inter-kinship marriages in Malaysia reflects broader societal attitudes towards multiculturalism and ethnic diversity.

Malaysian society's acceptance of inter-kinship marriages, contrasting with cultures that favour endogamy, reflects a profound level of ethnic and cultural integration, influenced by historical and contemporary social dynamics, demonstrating Malaysia's commitment to freedom in marital unions and, by extension, its approach to multiculturalism.

It should be noted that exogamous marital unions are more prevalent within non-Malay ethnic groups in Malaysia, such as those between Chinese and Indian communities (colloquially termed *Chindian*) or between Chinese and Portuguese communities (commonly referred to as *Eurasian*). In contrast, such unions are less frequent within the Malay community, largely due to adherence to Islamic laws. Under these laws, if an individual of Muslim faith wishes to marry a non-Muslim, the non-Muslim partner is required to convert to Islam for the marriage to gain legal recognition in Malaysia (Act 303: 10 (1) and Act 303: 10 (2), Malaysia Federal Legislation portal)[14]. Conversely, marriages between a Malay and a non-Malay Muslim are permitted, representing a hybrid form of endogamous and exogamous practices that disregard ethnicity. Indeed, family law in Malaysia, particularly regarding marriage, is governed by two main statutes: the Law Reform (Marriage and Divorce) Act 1976 for civil marriages and the Islamic Family Law (Federal Territories) Act 1984 for Muslim marriages (Malaysia Federal Legislation portal). The 1976 Civil Marriage Act explicitly excludes Muslims, and in so doing precludes the possibility of a Muslim and a non-Muslim marrying under civil law. Muslims engaging in marriage or cohabitation with non-Muslims risk contravening various offenses under State Syariah criminal law (Malaysia Federal Legislation portal). Muslim marriages must be registered under the Islamic Family Law Act 1984. Islamic law generally prohibits marriages between Muslims and non-Muslims, except under specific limited circumstances (Malaysia Federal Legislation portal).

While Islamic law in Malaysia sets distinct boundaries in the context of interfaith marriages, the broader scholarly discussion on ethnic identity and national consciousness in the country brings into focus how biological, cultural, historical, and political factors shape the national identity. The notions of ethnic identity and national consciousness in Malaysia, as examined through various scholarly lenses, present a multidimensional narrative. This narrative is deeply influenced by a combination of the aforementioned factors, shaping the nation's approach to governance, ethnic relations, and national identity. Huntington, in *Who*

[14] Act 303: 10 (1): No man shall marry a non-Muslim except a *Kitabiyah*. Act 303: 10 (2): No woman shall marry a non-Muslim. (Act 303 (11.3.2014).pdf [agc.gov.my])

Are We?: The Challenges to America's National Identity (2004) challenges traditional views of ethnic identity, suggesting that national identities often emerge from historical contexts, such as wars, rather than solely from shared ethnicity. This perspective is particularly relevant in understanding how national consciousness, like the British identity and many others, can arise from shared experiences and struggles, rather than purely ethnic commonalities. Huntington's theory is crucial in analysing how Malaysian national identity may similarly be formed through collective historical experiences, transcending mere ethnic definitions. These unique and hybrid identities that emerge from the intermingling of various ethnic groups in Malaysia, particularly Eurasians and mixed-heritage communities, extend the discourse to encompass navigation between multiple cultural norms. Malaysia's Eurasians and mixed-heritage communities illustrate the "fluidity and transformability of identities", as described by Holst.

> […] this model opens up the space for acknowledging the fluidity and transformability of identities in general. Thus, an individual has the option to choose certain affiliations or identities that are more meaningful to him or her and reduce others to a necessary minimum. Some of these identities will be stronger than others and thus more unlikely to change, but hardly any is cast in stone. (2012: 29)

The ability to select and prioritise affiliations that hold the most personal significance, while downplaying less resonant ones, offers individuals a tailored approach to their identity. This model acknowledges that while some identities may be more enduring, none are immutable, reflecting the broader discourse on the malleable nature of cultural identity in Malaysia's diverse society. Ang, in *Together-in-Difference: Beyond Diaspora, Into Hybridity* (2003) explores deeply hybrid identities, including the challenges these groups face in fully identifying with their cultural and traditional roots. He discusses how one identifies "oneself as part of a globally significant, transnational […] diasporic community", emphasising the social and cultural exclusion often experienced by individuals with hybrid identities (2003: 4). In doing so, he stresses how such groups frequently confront issues of exclusion and struggle with their identity and sense of belonging.

Stuart Hall, in *Cultural Identity and Diaspora* (1990) introduces the concept of identity within the context of political movements or "politics of position", underlining the impact of identity politics in shaping perceptions and interactions among groups (1990: 226). Race and ethnicity dynamics in Malaysia are understood from a perspective in which identities are often

defined in opposition to the "perception of others", a perspective also emphasised by Wodak *et al.* in *The discursive construction of national identities* (2009). These ethnocentric and nationalist tendencies significantly influence the reinforcement of divisions and impede integration within the multicultural setting in Malaysian society. Building upon this, Huntington (2004) underlines that identity is moulded by both individual and group perspectives, as individuals differentiate themselves from others based on shared or contrasting traits. This perspective on identity signifies that it is not innate from birth but rather evolves through consciousness and self-recognition in relation to others. Consequently, it becomes evident that identity is a dynamic construct influenced by historical legacies and social contexts.

The scholarly examination of ethnic identity and national consciousness in Malaysia reveals a complex interaction of factors contributing to a profound awareness of race and ethnicity. Malaysia's postcolonial history, influenced by a diverse colonial heritage, exerts a significant impact on its endeavours to construct a cohesive, multicultural society. This ongoing discourse between historical legacies and contemporary aspirations constitutes a salient component of Malaysia's continuous pursuit of an inclusive society that encompasses a heterogeneous heritage. These identities elucidate the dynamic process of cultural assimilation and differentiation, illuminating strategies individuals employ to negotiate their roles within a multifarious societal framework. This negotiation frequently entails striking a balance between tradition and modernity, resulting in complex cultural expressions that are both distinctive and intrinsically linked to the broader Malaysian identity. Such interactions not only mirror the diversity of historical legacies but also contribute to the evolving narrative of Malaysian identity within the context of a globalised world.

2.2.5. Dearth of education opportunities in Malaysia

In Malaysia, the educational landscape is marked by a significant disparity in the availability of educational choices, particularly affecting the non-*Bumiputeras* (comprising non-Malay and non-indigenous ethnic groups) who represent the minority groups. This issue stems from sociopolitical factors, historical contexts, and policy decisions that have historically favoured the *Bumiputeras* (comprising Malay and indigenous ethnic groups). Ethnocentrism emerges as a crucial concept when examining the clivage between *Bumiputeras* and non-*Bumiputeras* as it encapsulates assessing another culture through the lens of one's own cultural norms and values (Dillon, 2020). Dillon notes that this tendency is common, stating that "virtually all cultures have been ethnocentric to some degree", which often intertwines with "stereotypical thinking" (2020: 300). This concept provides a framework for understanding the cultural dynamics and potential biases inherent in the relationship between these two groups. The result is a constrained educational environment for minorities, where opportunities for quality education, scholarships, and higher education placements are limited. During articulates:

> For [Gramsci] hegemonic forces constantly alter their content as social and cultural conditions change […] are improvised and negotiable [...] culture could also be seen as what Michel Foucault was beginning to think of as a form of "governmentality", […] a means to produce conforming or "docile" citizens, most of all through the education system. (2010: 4)

These hegemonic forces are seen as a means of shaping "docile" citizens, particularly through education, aligning with Foucault's idea of "governmentality", which signifies how culture and education serve as tools for maintaining power and influencing individual and societal behaviours. This articulation directly relates to the issue of educational inequity in Malaysia. This inequity undermines the principle of equal educational opportunities, which is a cornerstone for societal fairness and cohesion. When education, a tool of hegemony, becomes unevenly distributed, it not only contradicts the ideal of equal chances for all citizens but also risks deepening socioeconomic divides and ethnic tensions. It has long-term adverse effects on Malaysia's social fabric and its overall national development, illustrating how educational disparities can exacerbate broader societal inequalities and impede collective progress.

Bumiputera vs. non-*Bumiputera*

As previously discussed, the Malaysian federal government implemented affirmative action policies that favour the politically dominant *Bumiputera* ethnic majority, who were economically disadvantaged. During the early stages of the Malaysian nation-state, Malays were predominantly employed in low-productivity agricultural jobs, while the Chinese, in particular, were disproportionately represented in high-productivity occupations such as manufacturing, mining, and construction (Mahathir, 2008 [1970]; Hooker, 2003; Holst, 2012; Saw, 2015). The dissatisfaction of Malays over the unequal wealth distribution with the Chinese led to the most severe interethnic riots in the nation's history on May 13, 1969. As demonstrated in 2.2.3, the Malaysian government introduced the New Economic Policy (NEP) in 1971, in response to achieving national unity by eliminating poverty regardless of ethnicity and addressing interethnic economic disparities, particularly between Malays and Chinese (Mahathir, 2008 [1970]; Hooker, 2003; Holst, 2012; Saw, 2015). Among the NEP's objectives, the government prioritised interethnic wealth redistribution, including the creation of a Malay entrepreneurial middle class and ensuring 30% *Bumiputera* control of the corporate sector (Gomez & Jomo, 1999; Jomo, 1990, 2004, 2007). Additionally, as added by Yee and Wong:

> [T]he "government also introduced the National Education Policy that set the national language as the main medium of instruction and developed a national curriculum and examination system to promote national unity through standardised education. In 1970, the *Rukunegara* (national ideology) was introduced as de facto pledge of allegiance to develop national identity along the different ethnic groups. (in David *et al*., 2010: 201-2)

Despite the fact that more than half a century has passed since Malaysia gained its independence, "issues of peace, interethnic relations, harmony and unity are still being discussed" (Yee & Wong in David *et al*., 2010: 202). The creation of religious classes and vernacular schools has in some ways failed to build a "unified education system" (Pillai in Ratnam, 2019: 88), segregating children based on their ethnic groups and faiths. For example, Hooker explains:

> Malay vernacular schools [were] organised by the British for 'ordinary' Malays, and an elite Malay College established to provide the children of the Malay aristocracy with sufficient English education to enable them to participate in the administration of colonial Malaya. Clearly, pupils in each of the three streams would have very different educational experiences and

> could expect very different career paths. Only the *madrasah* and *pondok* (village religious schools run by local Muslim teachers) were outside the colonial system and drew their inspiration from the Middle East, Egypt and Turkey. Graduates from the *madrasah* became religious teachers or leaders of modernist Muslim organisations. (2003: 171)

The diverse educational streams in colonial Malaya led to varied career paths, reflecting societal stratification and differing colonial and local aspirations. These separate streams influenced social mobility and power distribution. Consequently, state-backed affirmative action policies have privileged *Bumiputeras* in areas like corporate equity, land ownership, access to public higher education institutions, government funding for tertiary studies, government tenders, and employment opportunities in the public sector, and to a lesser extent, the private sector (Gomez & Jomo, 1999; Jomo, 1990, 2004, 2007).

Holst indicates that the "omnipresent quota system" whether "in the fields of politics, economy, or education" has resulted in the assumption that Malaysians "have homogenous interests in how society should be shaped" since "primordial notions of race still dominate discourses in politics and society" (2012: 1-2). From 1971 to 2001, an official quota system based on ethnicity was implemented for admission to Malaysian public universities. Koh Sin Yee whose works encompass migration and mobility in Southeast Asia quotes Tzannatos (1991) in *British Colonial Legacies, Citizenship Habitus, and a Culture of Migration: Mobile Malaysians in London, Singapore and Kuala Lumpur* (2014):

> First, *bumiputera* quotas for public university places were introduced. This was initially set at 75:25 *bumiputera* to non-*bumiputera* students, and was theoretically adjusted to 55:45 by the early 1980s, although the actual proportions by 1985 were 80:20. As a result, non-*bumiputera* students had to resort to alternative higher education strategies, including accessing private tertiary education and/or overseas education. (2017: 84)

This disparity indicates the profound impact of state-endorsed preferential educational policies aimed at bolstering the participation of Malays, who have historically been underrepresented in education, argues Viswanathan Selvaratnam in *Ethnicity, Inequality, and Higher Education in Malaysia* (1988). Consequently, these policies have resulted in an overrepresentation of Malays within the public education sector, simultaneously exerting a detrimental effect on non-Malay communities, particularly the Chinese and Indian. Selvaratnam, Koh, and Tan and

Santhiram (2010) share the same argument that many affluent Chinese Malaysians have chosen to pursue tertiary education overseas due to their experiences and fear of rejection by public universities. This trend continued until the expansion of the local private higher education market in 1996, which provided alternative opportunities. However, this left economically disadvantaged individuals with fewer educational prospects. Transitioning into the realm of meritocracy, particularly in coveted fields like medicine and engineering, the approach to admissions remains controversial, with indications of *Bumiputera* preference. This situation raises concerns about the genuine implementation of merit-based selection, questioning the fairness and inclusivity of the system.

Further complicating this landscape is the introduction of meritocracy in Malaysian higher education in 2002, replacing the quota system to base admissions on academic and co-curricular achievements. As highlighted by J. E. Roemer in *Equality of Opportunity* (1998) and K. P. Tan in *Meritocracy and Elitism in a Global City: Ideological Shifts in Singapore* (2008), this shift, while aimed at promoting fairness, has faced significant challenges. Meritocracy tends to neglect the disparate backgrounds of students, perpetuating existing societal inequities. The effects of this system are uneven across ethnic groups; Malay students, for instance, grapple with economic challenges that limit their access to educational resources, in stark contrast to the more prosperous Chinese ethnic communities. The Indian ethnic community fears that meritocracy might exacerbate their socioeconomic struggles. Despite the intentions behind meritocratic policies, disparities between urban and rural educational opportunities and resources remain, challenging the principles of meritocracy. This is exemplified by the unequal distribution of university places among ethnic groups, fuelling ongoing debates and contention in Malaysian society.

Diverse routes in education

A significant proportion of non-*Bumiputera* students, predominantly of Chinese and Indian ethnic groups, face challenges in securing admission to vocationally oriented courses at local universities. Consequently, they are compelled to turn to private universities or pursue education abroad, incurring substantial financial burdens on their families, sponsors, and community organisations. The situation, which is rooted in the quota system and escalates interethnic conflicts, especially within the middle class, is stressed by Selvaratnam, Koh, Tan, and Santhiram. Previously, the urban non-Malay middle class had easier access to local universities, but this has increasingly become an apparent barrier. The quota policy, preferring

Bumiputeras, has led to widespread dissatisfaction among the non-*Bumiputera* populace. Selvaratnam (1988) argues that this policy, while intended to provide educational and training advantages to *Bumiputeras*, discriminates against non-*Bumiputeras* and contradicts the globally recognised principle of merit-based higher education access. V. Verma in *Malaysia: State and Civil Society in Transition* (2002) observes that the quota system's generous allocations for Malays in public universities may foster complacency and reduce competitiveness. This was exemplified in 2001 when 7,000 university places reserved for *Bumiputeras* under special quotas went unfilled, prompting debates over the efficacy of meritocracy versus positive discrimination. Furthermore, the employability of graduates from Malaysia's public universities is a concern, as they often lack the skills desired by employers, adversely affecting foreign investment in Malaysia. The quota system has inadvertently shifted from its initial goal of aiding less privileged *Bumiputeras* to predominantly benefiting the more affluent *Bumiputera* sectors, thus perpetuating socioeconomic disparities within the community.

In Malaysia's higher education and employment sectors, a pattern of ethnic preferential treatment, primarily benefiting the *Bumiputera* population, is evident. Scholarly research highlights that government scholarships for international studies, managed by the Public Services Commission, have historically been based on ethnic quotas (Selvaratnam, 1988). Anglophone countries such as Australia, the United Kingdom, and the United States have effectively utilised international tertiary education and scholarship programmes as strategic tools for shaping future global leaders. These programmes are designed to enable students to acquire diverse skills and knowledge abroad, with the potential of returning to their home countries. Prominent among these initiatives are the Fulbright Scholarship Program from the USA[15], the Harvard University Boustany Foundation MBA Scholarship[16] also from the USA, the Australia Awards[17], the British Chevening Scholarships from the UK[18], and the ASEAN Scholarship from Singapore[19]. Furthermore, programmes like the Khazanah Global Scholarship[20] and the MyBrainSc Scholarship[21] are also notable. These scholarships not only facilitate Malaysian students' education in top-tier foreign universities but also mandate their

[15] Fulbright Scholars | Fellowships for Research & Teaching Abroad
[16] MBA Harvard - Scholarship Program of the Boustany Foundation (boustany-foundation.org)
[17] Australia Awards | Australian Government Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (dfat.gov.au)
[18] Scholarships | Chevening
[19] ASEAN Scholarship | MOE
[20] Khazanah Global Scholarship Programme - Scholarship Programmes | Yayasan Khazanah
[21] MyBrainSc (mohe.gov.my)

return to Malaysia. The goal is to harness their newly acquired Western ideologies and skills for the benefit of national development and progress. The Malaysian educational landscape is further enriched by innovative approaches like twinning and degree transfer programs with foreign universities (Koh, 2017). These programmes provide a hybrid model of education, allowing students to divide their study time between Malaysian institutions and universities abroad. Additionally, the presence of international branch campuses, such as the University of Nottingham in Malaysia, brings a dimension of Western education to the local scene. Through these educational structures, there is a transformative impact on the students' thinking, values, and overall life opportunities, underlining the profound influence of these educational exchanges.

This has led to a bifurcated structure in higher education, with *Bumiputera* students predominantly enrolled in public institutions, while ethnic minorities gravitate towards private higher learning institutions, as documented by Lee Hwok Aun in his latest work on Malaysian education policies *Malaysia's New Economic Policy: Fifty Years of Polarization and Impasse* (2022). According to a report by Lee in *Diversity in Malaysia's Civil Service: From Venting Old Grouses to Seeking New Grounds* (2023), ethnic Malays, who make up more than 57% of the country's population, are significantly overrepresented in the federal government staff, accounting for 78% of the total workforce and 80% of top decision-making positions. This overrepresentation is more pronounced when considering that minority groups, which constitute about 42% of the population, only make up around 22% of public service employees. This imbalance highlights the underrepresentation of minority groups, including Chinese Malaysians, Indian Malaysians, and the indigenous peoples of Sabah and Sarawak, who formally share *Bumiputera* status with Peninsula-residing Malays. The continuation of affirmative action for *Bumiputeras* encompassing policies like the New Economic Policy (NEP) which officially concluded in 1991, and its successors such as the 10th Malaysia Plan in 2010 and the National Economic Action Council (NEAC) in the same year, has been a focal point of scholarly critique. These policies have spanned over four decades and have become a contentious issue. The critics focus on the absence of effective management and transparency within the circles of politically powerful Malays. In this context, favouritism and preferential treatment, coupled with corrupt practices, have been scientifically linked to an increase in socioeconomic disparities, both between and within different ethnic groups. Concurrently, the Malaysian government perceives discussions surrounding affirmative action in areas of economic development, education, and social issues as delicate, with the potential to exacerbate

tensions across ethnic and religious lines. As Cheu posits: "Malaysia's survival as a nation depends precisely on the development of such a state of nationhood, and not on the domination of one group over another" (2020: 30). This perspective is informed by an understanding of the complex sociopolitical dynamics and policy implications of communal harmony.

The impact of Malaysia's policies on the aspirations and experiences of young adults is significant. The classification and separation of social classes and ethnic groups within the occupational and tertiary education sectors profoundly influence their strategies and sentiments as they navigate opportunity structures. In addition to these influences, there is a notable trend among recent graduates to remain in the countries where they received their tertiary education. According to The World Bank report, in 2010 a substantial 54.5% of Malaysians chose to stay abroad upon completing their tertiary education, with 72% of them citing improved career prospects as a primary motivation for residing overseas.[22] This decision is often encouraged by their parents, who perceive better employment opportunities abroad. This trend reflects the broader socioeconomic and educational landscape in Malaysia, where affirmative action policies, ethnic representation, and opportunities have shaped not only the educational choices but also the career trajectories of young adults. This phenomenon suggests a shift in the traditional patterns of education and employment among Malaysian youth, indicative of broader changes in global mobility and employment market preferences. Additionally, upon completing their education, some international students view their stay in the United Kingdom as an opportunity to pursue employment and permanent settlement. Koh identifies primary reasons driving this trend using the term "culture of migration":

> [F]irstly, that *migration/mobility is a common, accepted way of life* for individuals and their families, and secondly, that *migrating for education has become an internalised social mobility strategy* that may not be consciously recognised as a way to negotiate structural constraints posed by Malaysia's *bumiputera*-differentiated citizenship and the practice of race-based affirmative action policies. […] in the case of mobile Malaysians, migrating for education […] becomes an internalised *cultural practice* […]. […] a pattern of migration (especially for education) arises in the Malaysian context,

[22] The Malaysia Economic Monitor edition delves into the topic of brain drain and represents the result of a partnership between the Malaysian Government and the World Bank. It serves as a forum for the public discourse, in-depth analysis, and the dissemination of insights pertaining to the challenges encountered by Malaysia on its path towards achieving high-income status. (The World Bank preface)

> and subsequently, this transforms into a more permanent migration. […] mobile Malaysians' culture of migration is intertwined with British colonial legacies of race, education and citizenship. (2017: 27)

Koh's argument offers a critical analysis of migration and education patterns among Malaysians, linking them to broader sociopolitical and historical contexts. This trend of migrating for education is not just about seeking better opportunities but also a cultural response to domestic constraints. It is intricately linked to the British colonial legacy, which has shaped the nation's "race, education, and citizenship" frameworks. Over time, this educational migration often leads to permanent settlement abroad for economic reasons, pointing to a broader issue of "brain drain" and its implications for Malaysia's development, which will be discussed in the following section. The analysis calls attention to the reasons behind Malaysian migration patterns, emphasising the relationship between historical, cultural, and sociopolitical influences.

2.2.6. Economic migration: Malaysian "brain drain"

Prior to the globalisation era, brain drain, specifically denoted the emigration of highly skilled and educated individuals "from the less developed economies (the home countries) to the developed or industrialized economies (the host countries) such as United States of America (USA) and United Kingdom (UK)" and was considered an issue with adverse effects on less-developed countries (Hoo *et al*., 2016: 15). In response to the prolonged issue of brain drain, countries like India and China have seen their governments implementing effective strategies to attract these skilled individuals back to their homelands, as noted by Hoo *et al*. in *Factors influencing return intentions of Malaysia's professional diaspora* (2016). The brain drain phenomenon is also prevalent in Malaysia and has received significant focus in academic studies.

Several studies by Lowell and Findlay (2001), Tansel and Gungor (2003) and Zweig *et al.* (2008) have identified key pull factors influencing the migration of skilled professionals to developed countries, highlighting aspects like higher wages, better employment conditions, improved job opportunities, a conducive work environment, stable political systems, and comfortable lifestyles as significant pull factors (in Hoo *et al*., 2016). In additional to these factors were working in collaboration with leading scientists and experiencing new cultures as motivators among Austrian academics and researchers (Kurka *et al.* in Hoo *et al*., 2016). Other factors cited by Martin and Zurcher (2008), Ravendran (2008), and Javed (2011) were labour recruitment, family unification, better work-life balance, and higher living standards. Additionally, key reasons for migration from Jamaica and Malaysia, respectively, included easier access to information about opportunities and better career prospects, as reiterated by Parkins (2011) and Foo (2011) (in Hoo *et al*., 2016). On the other hand, push factors analysed by Sako (2002), Tansel and Gungor (2003), Nurse (2004) and Ziguras and Law (2006) were wage disparities, poor working conditions, economic downturns, and political instability, contributing significantly to the brain drain phenomenon in their respective countries (in Hoo *et al*., 2016). These factors range from economic and political challenges to social and environmental issues, influencing professionals to leave their home countries in search of better opportunities abroad. Consequently, this outflow results in a substantial depletion of talent and potential within Malaysia, thereby exerting adverse effects on various sectors of its economy and hindering the nation's overall progress. Additionally, the brain drain phenomenon intertwines with broader global issues related to migration and talent distribution, often

manifesting as a delicate balance between national development objectives and individual aspirations.

The World Bank's 2011 report in *Malaysia Economic Monitor* offers a comprehensive analysis of the push factors that drive skilled migration among Malaysians. Based on a series of interviews conducted in Malaysia, Singapore, and the United States, the report brought to light a prominent factor contributing to brain drain in Malaysia—the systemic prevalence of ethnic discrimination within the country. This discrimination significantly impedes employment opportunities and career advancement, especially the non-*Bumiputeras* or the non-Malay and non-indigenous groups who are discontent with Malaysia's exclusive policies, "who make up the bulk of the diaspora", constituting a substantial segment of the skilled professionals emigrating (The World Bank, 2011: 137). The report's data reveal that as of 2010, there were over 1 million Malaysians residing abroad, and approximately one-third of all migration from Malaysia can be categorised as brain drain (The World Bank, 2011). These individuals often find themselves disadvantaged in their home country due to biased workplace policies and practices, compelling them to seek career prospects abroad. Notably, the brain drain trend is **gradually increasing** in advanced financial markets, telecommunications, biotechnology, material science, and nanotechnology, accompanied by a rise in the emigration of surgeons, doctors, and specialised educators and professionals to destinations such as Singapore, Australia, Brunei, the United Kingdom, and the United States (The World Bank, 2011). In countries where a more meritocratic system is perceived, these skilled individuals encounter an environment that more equitably acknowledges and rewards their talents and qualifications. This exacerbates the brain drain problem in Malaysia, resulting not only in the loss of its skilled workforce but also in the underutilisation of talent within its borders—talent that is crucial for national development and maintaining competitiveness in the global arena.

In the same vein, G. Foo conducted an online survey as part of the research presented in *Quantifying the Malaysian brain drain and an investigation of its key determinants* (2011). This study involved the collection and analysis of data obtained from 194 Malaysians living abroad, with a specific focus on elucidating the factors motivating the brain drain phenomenon. These determinants encompass a diverse spectrum of factors that exert a significant influence on the decisions of professionals, both in terms of their departure from Malaysia and their inclination to forego returning to their home country. Predominantly, among these factors, are the relative disadvantages in terms of salary and benefits. Malaysian professionals frequently discern that their competencies and expertise are met with more favourable financial

remuneration and comprehensive benefit packages in foreign nations. Additionally, the dearth of promising career prospects within Malaysia, particularly within specialised or advanced fields, constrains the potential for professional advancement and personal growth. This limitation compels individuals to seek opportunities in environments where their career trajectories promise greater dynamism and fulfilment. Furthermore, the restricted access to quality education emerges as a key factor, particularly for professionals with families. This cohort seeks settings where their children can access superior educational opportunities. Concurrently, concerns about social injustice, including ethnic discrimination and the experience of unequal treatment, exacerbate these circumstances. These conditions foster a pervasive sense of disillusionment and engender a desire for societies characterised by more equitable principles. What is more, the imperative consideration of safety and security assumes critical significance in this context, as professionals actively seek environments where they, along with their families, perceive heightened levels of safety and security. Collectively, these factors contribute to the brain drain phenomenon by motivating professionals to depart from Malaysia in pursuit of more attractive prospects abroad. These same determinants dissuade their return, forcing Malaysia to address ways in which to retain and attract its skilled workforce effectively.

Another crucial facet extensively examined within academic discourse pertains to Malaysia's economic orientation, a factor that carries profound implications for the brain drain phenomenon. Various studies, including those conducted by The World Bank, have highlighted that Malaysia has conventionally directed its economic focus toward the production and manufacturing sectors, with comparatively less emphasis on research and development (R&D) endeavours. This particular economic orientation engenders a conspicuous mismatch in job prospects for highly skilled professionals, who are typically equipped with training and inclinations geared towards advanced research and innovation. This structural disposition not only restricts the availability and breadth of opportunities in advanced R&D roles but also serves to diminish the overall allure of the domestic job market for these adept individuals. Consequently, as discerned in Foo's survey, professionals often choose foreign countries with more evolved and diversified economies, especially those boasting robust research and innovation sectors, as far more enticing. In such nations, they encounter better career prospects, enhanced financial remuneration, and a greater expanse of opportunities for both professional advancement and personal fulfilment. This appeal is accentuated to the extent that it contributes

to the migration of Malaysia's skilled workforce to these foreign destinations, thereby depleting the nation's talent pool.

The brain drain phenomenon in Malaysia is also influenced by social factors. An examination of these factors that was elucidated by researchers in this specific field of interest cited above shed light on various concerns. These concerns are not limited to inequitable treatment of professionals, especially in promotions, and a lack of stimulating and challenging work environments. More critical factors included frustration with rigid bureaucracy, unresponsive government systems, restrictions on personal freedoms, ethnic tensions, and religious divides (Ratnam, 2019). These elements collectively contribute substantially to cultivating a profound sense of professional dissatisfaction among skilled workers operating within the Malaysian context. It is noteworthy that many professionals in Malaysia grapple with a workplace culture that may not fully acknowledge or appropriately reward merit and diligent effort, particularly in comparison to their counterparts in more developed nations. The resultant dearth of recognition and the languid pace of career advancement can induce feelings of demotivation. This, in turn, impels skilled workers to seek environments wherein their talents receive greater appreciation, and their contributions are visibly rewarded. Moreover, the absence of stimulating and invigorating work environments within Malaysia often constrains these professionals from fully harnessing their skills and realising their full potential. This circumstance propels them toward exploring opportunities abroad, where they perceive more conducive settings for professional growth, creative expression, and innovative pursuits. Consequently, these social and professional challenges not only culminate in the outflow of talent from Malaysia but also draw attention to the urgent necessity for systemic transformations in workplace culture and the provision of enhanced professional development opportunities.

The Malaysian government's stance on immigration and foreign labour compounds the complexity of the brain drain issue and introduces an additional layer of impediments. The stringent immigration policies, particularly those impacting foreign spouses and children of Malaysian professionals, constitute a substantial deterrent for individuals contemplating a return to Malaysia. These policies, extensively deliberated in the academic literature, bear far-reaching consequences extending beyond the professional realm, significantly influencing the personal and familial aspects of Malaysian expatriates' lives. For professionals residing abroad, the prospect of repatriating to Malaysia becomes considerably less appealing when confronted with the arduous challenges associated with acquiring residency or work permits for their non-

Malaysian family members. This predicament not only dissuades the return of highly skilled Malaysians but also serves as a reflection of deeper issues within the country's sociopolitical framework, underscoring concerns related to inclusivity, diversity, and global mobility, which have gained increasing prominence in a globalised world. The rigidity inherent in these immigration policies may inadvertently exacerbate the brain drain phenomenon, obliging Malaysian professionals to conduct a delicate balancing act, weighing the allure of employment opportunities against the welfare and stability of their families. The inflexibility of these immigration policies perpetuates a state where the personal and familial considerations of skilled professionals are inextricably linked with their career decisions, ultimately contributing to the ongoing outflow of talent from Malaysia.

In response to the challenge of enhancing human capital development, Malaysia proposed a 'brain gain' initiative, aiming to encourage skilled professionals with extensive international experience to return and contribute to their homeland. The government, through agencies like MOSTI (Ministry of Science, Technology & Innovation) and National Council of Professors (MPN), has invested considerably to attract top talent from abroad (Hoo *et al*., 2016). Despite the governmental initiatives through MOSTI's Brain Gain Malaysia (BGM) programme, New Economic Model, Economic Transformation Programme (ETP), Productivity-Linked Wage System (PLWS) and the establishment of Talent Corporation Malaysia Berhad, the retention of these talents remains low (Hoo *et al*., 2016; The Asean Post, 2019; MalayMail, 2021). A significant reason could be the limited awareness among Malaysia's skilled professional diaspora about Talent Corporation Malaysia Berhad's role in recruiting Malaysian expatriates and foreign skilled professionals. Furthermore, the incentives offered under the Returning Expat Programme (REP), Nurturing Expert Talent and Career Comeback Programme are perceived as unattractive (Hoo *et al*., 2016). This complex array of issues necessitates more comprehensive and appealing strategies by the Malaysian government and its agencies, not just in terms of financial incentives but also for enhancing the overall professional and living conditions. Added by chief executive officer Tricia Yeoh of Institute for Democracy and Economic Affairs (IDEAS), this entails:

> [C]reating a more stable and robust political system, transparent and accountable institutions, fair and rules-based economic systems, and ensuring meritocratic practices in specific areas such as enterprise development and equity ownership, while understanding the need to address

> equitable opportunities for the poorer communities. (in The Malay Mail, 2021).

Malaysia's approach to reversing brain drain through the brain gain initiative begs the need for a more comprehensive strategy. While the government and its agencies have made significant efforts, the challenges of low awareness among expatriates and unattractive incentives remain key obstacles, "affecting Malaysia's economy more and more in various sectors […], yet with limited success" (Holst, 2012: 95). Addressing these aspects comprehensively is essential for Malaysia to effectively retain and attract skilled professionals, contributing to its long-term human capital development and economic growth.

Based on the literature reviewed, several common push and pull factors have emerged as influential in shaping the intentions of Malaysia's diaspora regarding their return to the country. The brain drain phenomenon in Malaysia is inherently complex, driven by a combination of economic policies, social inequities, immigration regulations, and the broader sociopolitical landscape. This prevailing trend emphasises the imperative for Malaysia to engage in a thorough reassessment and, potentially, a restructuring of its economic priorities. Such a strategic shift is essential for the nation's capacity to both retain and attract skilled professionals—a critical component of its long-term economic advancement and global competitiveness. Simultaneously, the resolution of immigration challenges assumes paramount importance, as it is essential for Malaysia to cultivate an environment that is more conducive to the repatriation of its skilled diaspora. This, in turn, allows the nation to harness their expertise and contributions for the betterment of its national development objectives. However, until this is accomplished, Malaysia will continue to experience the brain drain phenomenon, losing its citizens to foreign allure through a culture of migration.

2.2.7. Malaysia's culture of migration to the United Kingdom

The impact of British colonialism on global migration, particularly from Malaysia to the United Kingdom, is profound and far-reaching. It is within this context that Darwin's reflection on the British empire resonates profoundly: "Here was the grandest of imaginary empires, the one that lived longest and survived many defeats" (2012: 32). This reflection epitomises the enduring impact and legacy of British colonialism, not just in Malaysia but globally, shaping migratory trends and influencing the lives and destinies of countless individuals across various periods. As analysed earlier, during the colonial period, the British empire's policies orchestrated a significant mobility of people, particularly through the recruitment of indentured labourers from China and India. These labourers were brought to work in plantations, mines, and on various infrastructural projects in Malaysia, setting a precedent for future migration flows. This orchestrated economic mobility was not just a relocation of labour but a transformation of the societal and demographic landscape that would have lasting effects on Malaysia and its diaspora. The migration initiated during the colonial era established enduring links between Malaysia and the United Kingdom, which have evolved over time but remain significant. These historical patterns of mobility have influenced subsequent generations, shaping their perceptions of migration and the opportunities it represents. The legacy of British colonialism in this context is not merely a historical footnote but a continuing influence on the choices and opportunities available to Malaysian migrants. This deep-rooted connection between Malaysia and the United Kingdom, forged in the colonial era, set the stage for the diverse and complex migratory trends that would unfold in the subsequent decades. It founded a relationship that has endured through various global changes, influencing the socioeconomic ties between the two nations and the individual lives of migrants navigating these interconnected histories.

Postcolonial developments ushered in a paradigm shift in the flow of Malaysian migration. Malaysian migration underwent a significant transformation, transitioning from a primarily labour-oriented movement to one driven by educational and professional aspirations. This shift reflects broader global trends and changes within Malaysia itself, illustrating how migration patterns are influenced by both external opportunities and internal developments. The latter half of the 20th century saw an emergent trend in Malaysia, as increasing numbers of Malaysians began to seek higher education and professional opportunities overseas. The United Kingdom, with its prestigious educational institutions and diverse professional landscape, became a key destination for these migrants. This trend signifies a move towards capitalising

on educational and professional avenues for personal and national development, contrasting with the earlier migration driven by colonial labour demands. The preference for the United Kingdom among Malaysian migrants can be attributed to several factors. British universities are renowned for their quality of education, offering a wide range of opportunities for academic and professional advancement. Additionally, the professional landscape in the United Kingdom, known for its diversity and dynamism, presents numerous employment opportunities for Malaysian graduates, making it an attractive destination.

As demonstrated earlier, this migration trend is also influenced by Malaysia's internal sociopolitical dynamics, including institutionalised policies that have historically favoured certain ethnic groups. Such policies have prompted individuals from other ethnic backgrounds to seek opportunities where meritocracy is more pronounced, leading to a brain drain in some sectors within Malaysia. The emergence of a culture of migration within Malaysia has far-reaching implications for the country's demographics, economy, and the identity of its diaspora. Malaysians abroad often find themselves balancing their cultural heritage with the influences of their host countries, leading to identities and a sense of belonging that transcend geographical boundaries. Key motivators for this migration include the pursuit of quality education, professional advancement, better economic prospects, and a desire for a lifestyle that may not be readily achievable in Malaysia. These factors, as highlighted in the research by Koh (2017) (refer to section in 2.2.5), are not just individual aspirations but reflect broader trends in global mobility, where individuals and families seek environments that offer greater opportunities for personal and professional growth.

The recent narrative of Malaysian migration has taken on a global dimension, mirroring today's global economies. The Malaysian diaspora, now encompassing a broad spectrum of individuals including students, professionals, entrepreneurs, and investors, is a testament to the country's broader patterns of contemporary transnational migration. As of 2020, the *United Nations International Migrant Stock* report illustrates that the global Malaysian diaspora numbers approximately 1,860,037 individuals. This substantial figure epitomises the widespread nature of Malaysian migration, with significant populations establishing themselves across various continents and cultures. These data, as illustrated in Figure 2 sourced from the UN report, identify key destinations for Malaysian migrants including Singapore, Australia, the United Kingdom, the United States of America, Canada, China, and New Zealand. Singapore emerges as the predominant choice for migration with 1,132,924 Malaysian citizens, representing a major segment of the foreign-born population. The reasons for this preference encompass geographical proximity, robust transportation links, cultural affinities, and shared historical experiences. These factors collectively make Singapore an attractive and logical choice for many Malaysians looking to live and work abroad.

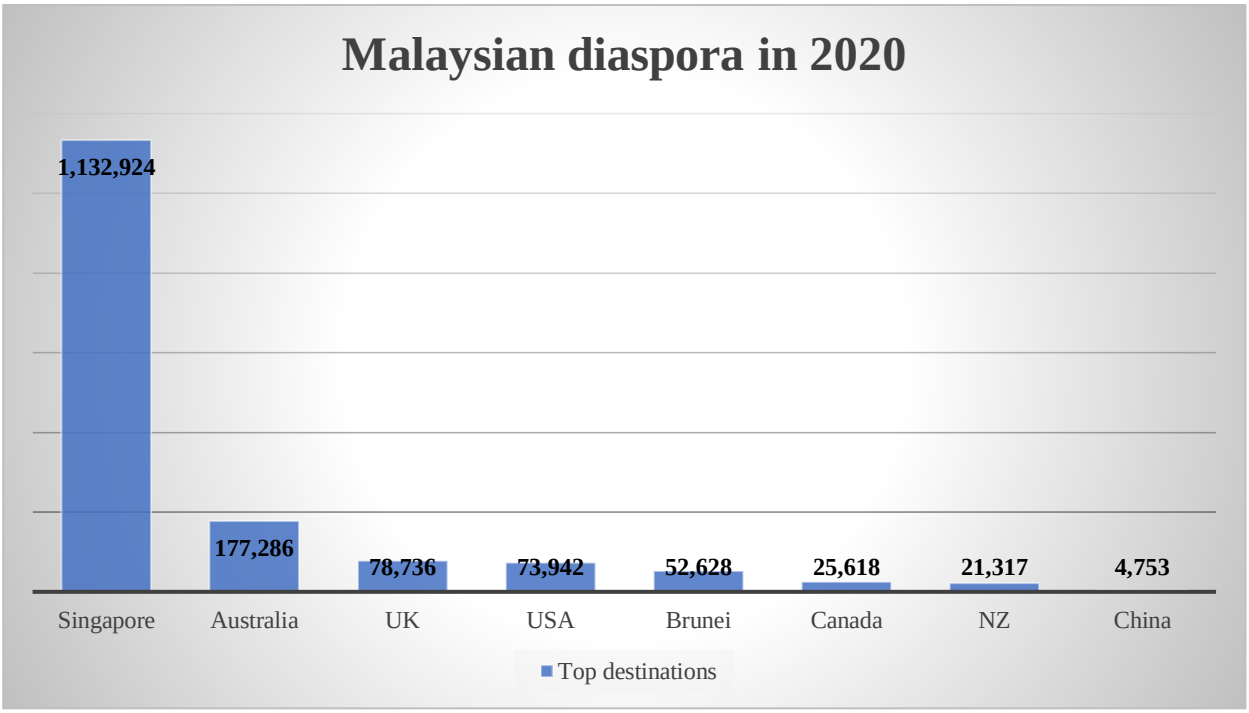

Figure 2: Adapted - Malaysian diaspora in 2020. Source: 2020 UN report

Analogously, Australia is another key destination for Malaysian migrants, with the report indicating that around 177,286 Malaysians have settled there, particularly in cosmopolitan areas like Melbourne and Sydney. This preference can be attributed to Australia's high standard

of living, educational opportunities, and welcoming policies for skilled migrants. The United Kingdom, too, remains a significant draw for Malaysians, partly due to historical ties through the Commonwealth and the enduring allure of its educational and professional opportunities. The Malaysian diaspora in the United Kingdom, though not as large as those in Singapore or Australia, still represents a significant community of approximately 78,736 individuals, predominantly residing in Greater London and other principal cities of England. This population saw substantial growth post-World War II, with an even more pronounced increase following Malaysia's independence in 1957, reflecting the historical and ongoing ties between the two nations. In comparison, the United States hosts around 73,942 Malaysian citizens, indicating the diverse appeal of the country for Malaysians, possibly due to its vast educational and professional opportunities. Similarly, Brunei, with a population of 52,628 Malaysians, demonstrates the influence of geographical proximity and shared regional ties on migration patterns. The Malaysian community in Canada totals 25,618, whereas New Zealand and China are home to 21,317 and 4,753 Malaysians, respectively.

These figures exhibit the diversification of Malaysian migration destinations, influenced by a confluence of factors including educational opportunities, economic incentives, familial connections, and the desire for improved living standards. The presence of Malaysians in these countries also suggests a preference for English-speaking environments and countries with established links to Malaysia, often rooted in historical connections to the British empire. The data underline the relationship between migration and historical ties, particularly with former British colonies or Commonwealth countries, where shared language, legal systems, and cultural legacies continue to influence migration preferences. The enduring bond between Malaysia and the United Kingdom is not only facilitated by historical connections but by visa policies as well (explored in 2.2.2). The enduring connection between Malaysia and the United Kingdom emphasises Britain's continuing significance as a preferred destination for Malaysian migrants, a testament to the deep-rooted relationship between the two nations. This relationship is not merely historical but is actively perpetuated by the choices of individuals and families who opt for the United Kingdom, influenced by a blend of historical ties, economic opportunities, and personal aspirations. This pattern is a microcosm of the broader trends affecting the Malaysian diaspora globally, illustrating how these migrants navigate and contribute to global mobility. Their decisions to migrate are influenced by factors including the legacy of past connections, the allure of present opportunities, and the pursuit of future aspirations, collectively shaping a culture of transnational migration for Malaysians.

2.2.8. Chapter summary

This chapter delved into Malaysia's historical and contemporary sociocultural landscape and the profound impacts of British colonisation from the 19th century to 1957 on Malaysia's sociopolitical and economic framework. The legacy of colonisation continues to influence Malaysia's ethnic diversity and migration trends. The country's complex ethnic composition, comprising Malays, Chinese, Indians, indigenous groups and a mixed-ethnic group, presents challenges in cultural preservation and addressing historical disparities. Geographically, Malaysia is split into Peninsular Malaysia and East Malaysia, featuring diverse climatic conditions and natural landscapes that influence its biodiversity and socioeconomic activities.

The chapter also explored how historical migration, driven by colonial labour policies, reshaped Malaysia's demographic and ethnic composition, emphasising geography's role in the nation's development. The diversity in Malaysia's ethnic makeup is central to its identity, influencing language, religion, and the national narrative. Economically, Malaysia transitioned from a commodity-based economy to a diversified one, with a focus on manufacturing and Islamic finance, shaped by its strategic location and historical trade routes. Education in Malaysia faces the challenge of accommodating ethnic diversity while promoting national unity, with policies impacting language and socioeconomic development. Politically, Malaysia's federal constitutional monarchy and its evolution post-independence were examined, considering historical leaders and the legal classification of citizens by ethnicity and religion.

The chapter further analysed the impact of British colonialism on Malaysia's societal divisions and governance, including the introduction of Chinese and Indian labour, which significantly altered the nation's social fabric. The educational sector reveals disparities affecting non-*Bumiputera* groups, influenced by historical and policy-driven factors, with affirmative action policies like the NEP aiming to address these inequalities but also creating educational disparities. The "brain drain" phenomenon is significant in Malaysia, with skilled individuals migrating to developed countries due to systemic ethnic discrimination and better opportunities abroad. Malaysia's initiatives to reverse this trend face challenges, and require a more comprehensive approach to retain and attract its skilled workforce.

Lastly, the migration culture from Malaysia to the United Kingdom is rooted in colonial ties, evolving with postcolonial developments towards education and professional-driven migration, with the United Kingdom being a preferred destination due to its educational and

employment opportunities. Building on the understanding of Malaysia's migration culture, deeply intertwined with historical colonial ties and driven by aspirations for education and professional advancement, this chapter transitions to exploring the specific dynamics of United Kingdom immigration. In the ensuing chapter, 2.3, I study the landscape of immigration in the United Kingdom, exploring the complex aspects of migration patterns, the frameworks of immigration policies, and expanding on identity dynamics among both British residents and immigrant ethnic minorities. This exploration aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the diverse and dynamic migration trends to the United Kingdom.

2.3. United Kingdom immigration

The United Kingdom has long stood as a beacon of diverse cultures and opportunities, attracting individuals from around the globe. This influx, while enriching the nation's cultural diversity, has also presented complex challenges and opportunities. The British history of immigration is marked by significant events, such as the post-World War II labour shortages, the impact of joining and leaving the European Union, and the ongoing global humanitarian crises that have shaped the nation's immigration policies and demographic landscape. Recent years have witnessed a dynamic shift in British immigration trends and policies, influenced by a fluctuating pattern of political, economic, and social factors. These changes not only reflect but also contribute to the evolving identity of the British nation on the global stage. Understanding these trends improves the comprehension of the broader impacts of immigration on British society, economy, and its cultural fabric. Thus, the purpose of this chapter is to explore the various facets of British immigration, examining its historical evolution and current trends. This exploration aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of how immigration has shaped the United Kingdom, delving into its historical context, current trends, policies, and socioeconomic implications, including aspects of culture and identity. By scrutinising these elements, the chapter not only elucidates the nuances of immigration but also emphasises its significance in the nation's ongoing narrative, particularly spotlighting the experiences and contributions of ethnic minority immigrants within this broader context.

2.3.1. Historical context of United Kingdom immigration

Post-World War era

> The British Empire grew in stages over the course of many centuries: from 'internal colonization' within the British Isles in the Middle Ages to seventeenth-century growth in North America and the West Indies, through phases of expansion in South Asia and Australasia in the eighteenth-century, and in Africa, the Pacific, and South-East Asia in the nineteenth-century. A final flourish of empire-building occurred in the Middle East in the early twentieth century. The Empire's character shifted over time, from an original emphasis on settler communities and a mercantile economic system to a multi-ethnic, global conglomeration powered by an industrial economy. (2013: 71)

Jackson's investigation, through this articulation, traces the British empire's growth from medieval times to the 20th century, highlighting its expansion across continents and transformation from a mercantile, settler-focused entity to a multiethnic industrial powerhouse. This evolution reflects broader global trends and the empire's adaptability to changing economic and demographic realities. During the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the United Kingdom saw a significant influx of immigrants from its Caribbean, African, and Indian subcontinent colonies, intended to address labour shortages. Post-World War I, migration surged, with many from the colonies filling low-skilled labour roles, and this migration continued to grow over time. Predominantly Punjabi men, many of whom were World War I veterans, along with families and relatives of seamen and semi-skilled workers from the shipping industry, represent a significant segment of Indian immigrants who sought better opportunities in major British cities (Sharma, 2012). This migration is part of a broader narrative of the Indian diaspora's global migration history, which dates back to 1834 and spans numerous countries (Hussain, 2005). During British colonial rule, Indians were subjected to an indenture system in African colonies, a condition resembling slavery (Hussain, 2005). Indeed, Jackson posits:

> The Empire oversaw other significant migrations too. The Atlantic slave trade transported twelve million people from Africa to the Americas and the West Indies. Between 1707 and 1807, Britain shipped about 30,000 of these slaves per annum, a gargantuan exercise in social engineering. There were

> countless smaller migrations too, such as the Indians sent to Uganda to build the railway or the steady trickle of Sikhs who accompanied the British around the world as policemen. (2013: 69)

Yet, despite the adversities of forced labour, the Indian community seized substantial opportunities abroad, exemplified by their valour in British imperial wars, showcasing their resilience and adaptability in the face of challenges (Hussain, 2005; Sharma, 2012). The labour shortage reached a critical point during World War II, precipitating a significant influx of immigrants, notably from Asia, Africa, and the Caribbean. These individuals, many of whom were skilled and semi-skilled workers such as electricians and mechanics, were drawn to Britain not merely to fill the urgent labour void but also in response to challenging conditions in their countries of origin (Sharma, 2012).

In the aftermath of World War II, the United Kingdom did indeed encounter severe labour shortages, primarily due to the devastation caused by the war and the subsequent need for reconstruction and economic recovery. McIntyre notes that "[a] tradition of equal rights for British subjects, and full employment in the immediate postwar years, encourage[d] migration into the mother country in the last days of Empire" (1998:132). Bridging the historical context of labour shortages in the United Kingdom post-World War II with the insights provided by McIntyre, it is evident that the pressing need for reconstruction and economic rejuvenation paved the way for a wave of migration. His observation points out how the confluence of equal rights for British subjects and a period of full employment during the post-war era served as a stimulus to encourage migration to the "mother country" in the twilight of the British empire. Shankley and Byrne in *Citizen rights and immigration*, stated that after World War II, the United Kingdom saw intensified migration, including around "200,000 soldiers settling in Scotland and London" due to changes in Poland's borders post-Yalta Conference, facilitated by the "Polish Resettlement Act 1947" (in Byrne *et al*., 2020: 36). Furthermore, "The European Volunteer Workers Scheme" also drew numerous Europeans to aid in post-war rebuilding (Shankley & Byrne in Byrne *et al*., 2020: 37). Additionally, according to Shankley and Byrne, Britain experienced significant colonial migration, with recruitment in the Caribbean for the transport sector and the National Health Service (NHS), and recruitment from the Indian subcontinent to fill labour shortages in various industries across England. Irish migration also continued to be a significant source of labour for the United Kingdom during this period (Shankley & Byrne in Byrne *et al*., 2020).

The ‘Windrush era’ stands as a crucial point in British immigration history, instrumental in defining modern immigration policies and demographics. Emblematic of this transformative period is the 1948 arrival of the Empire Windrush, bringing hundreds of Caribbean migrants and symbolising the onset of modern immigration to the United Kingdom. The government’s response to these labour shortages played a critical role in shaping the immigration landscape, and it was anchored in the British Nationality Act of 1948, which had major implications for the admission and integration of Commonwealth citizens. The British administration, under the leadership of Prime Minister Clement Attlee, responded to these labour shortages with pivotal legislative and policy changes. The British Nationality Act of 1948 was a seminal piece of legislation that had a profound impact on the status and rights of Commonwealth citizens within the United Kingdom. This act conferred British nationality upon all subjects of the British Empire and Commonwealth, effectively making Commonwealth citizens British subjects, as noted by McIntyre (1998). The Act laid the foundation for a more inclusive approach to immigration, as it recognised the rights of Commonwealth citizens to reside and work in the United Kingdom as equal subjects, regardless of their ethnicity or place of birth. Commonwealth citizens were encouraged to come to the United Kingdom to fill labour shortages and contribute to the post-war reconstruction efforts. This legal recognition of Commonwealth citizens as British subjects fostered a wave of immigration from various parts of the Commonwealth, particularly from the Caribbean, the Indian subcontinent, and Africa. Post-independence, economic challenges in India and Pakistan spurred migration to the United Kingdom during the 1950s, with Britain seeking manpower for its post-war reconstruction (Sharma, 2012). Indian migrants have since become a cardinal non-European community in Britain, contributing culturally, economically, and also benefiting India’s economy through remittances (Sharma, 2012). Their integration has been instrumental in shaping the multicultural fabric of British society.

Development of immigration policies

The transformation of the British immigration policies from the 1960s to the 1980s represents a critical phase in the nation’s legislative history, reflecting a shift toward more restrictive immigration controls and a redefined concept of citizenship and settlement rights. This period was marked by significant legislative changes under the leadership of Prime Ministers Harold Wilson, Edward Heath, and Margaret Thatcher, each contributing to the evolving narrative of British immigration and citizenship policies, deeply influenced by Britain’s colonial past and its governance framework. Stated earlier, the enactment of the 1948

British Nationality Act was a landmark event, establishing a legal distinction between Commonwealth citizens and British citizens. Initially, this legislation allowed both groups unrestricted entry into Britain, reflecting what seemed to be a post-war ethos of inclusivity50. However, the subsequent arrival of the "first black Commonwealth citizens", particularly after World War II, prompted a reassessment of these open-door policies, leading to a progressive tightening of immigration regulations (Choudhury in Emerson, 2011: 122).

The introduction of the Commonwealth Immigration Act of 1962, then 1968 and the subsequent 1971 Immigration Act marked a decisive turn in British immigration policy. These acts introduced the "'patriality' rule" or the right of abode, which effectively prioritised immigrants with direct familial connections to the United Kingdom, sidelining a significant number of Commonwealth citizens, especially those of "Asian origin living in East Africa" (Choudhury in Emerson, 2011: 123). Shankley and Byrne clarify:

> This move saw the beginning of a shift in British citizenship from *jus soli* to *jus sanguine* or citizenship passed on by parental lines rather than place of birth and favoured white Old Commonwealth migrants (Byrne, 2014). (in Byrne *et al*., 2020)

This legislative shift highlighted a growing inclination towards a more exclusive immigration policy, reflecting broader societal and political undercurrents of the time. Margaret Thatcher's era (1979-1990) further solidified the restrictive trajectory of British immigration policy. The British Nationality Act 1981 was particularly instrumental in this context, redefining the parameters of British citizenship and significantly curtailing immigration from Commonwealth nations by abolishing the automatic right to citizenship based on birth within the United Kingdom (Choudhury in Emerson, 2011; Shankley & Byrne in Byrne *et al*., 2020). This act fundamentally altered the immigration and citizenship landscape, emphasising familial ties to Britain as a critical criterion for settlement rights and creating a stark distinction between different groups of Commonwealth citizens. Despite these tightening measures, Commonwealth immigrants retained certain rights, including the ability to vote and the opportunity to apply for British citizenship after a period of residency. The transition from a multicultural to a community cohesion approach post-2001 marked another major shift in British immigration policy. Citizenship began to be viewed as a mechanism to promote civic identity and shared values among new immigrants, who were now encouraged to engage

actively with the community through various means, including civic ceremonies, language proficiency, and knowledge of life in the United Kingdom.

This evolving policy landscape highlighted a shift towards a merit-based and behaviour-influenced approach to citizenship, where 'earned citizenship' became a central theme. Indeed, Lassalle explains what is meant by earned citizenship: "The concept of 'earned citizenship' – developed by the highly controversial editor of *Prospect Magazine*, David Goodhart, and [was] adopted by Gordon Brown"[23] (*my translation*) (2009: 124). Immigrants were incentivised to demonstrate their commitment to the British community, potentially shortening their path to citizenship. This period of legislative evolution profoundly influenced the British social and political fabric, illustrating national identity, immigration policy, and broader societal integration efforts. These changes embody the unstable nature of immigration policy, reflecting the United Kingdom's ongoing struggle to balance its historical openness with contemporary challenges and priorities.

The Influence of the European Union

The association between the United Kingdom and the European Union (EU), particularly from the 1990s to the mid-2010s, represents a critical era in the evolution of British immigration policy, shaped profoundly by EU integration and national governance. This period, under the stewardship of successive British Prime Ministers: John Major, Tony Blair, Gordon Brown and David Cameron, witnessed significant legislative and policy developments that redefined the landscape of immigration and mobility within the EU. John Major's Conservative government was instrumental in guiding the United Kingdom toward deeper integration with the European Union, particularly through the ratification of the Maastricht Treaty in 1991 (Dummett in Blackstone *et al*., 1998). This treaty, officially known as the Treaty on European Union, was a landmark in European political history, establishing a new framework for the European Union. It introduced several key elements, such as the Economic and Monetary Union, which paved the way for the euro, and built the foundation for enhanced political, economic, and social cooperation among member states (Dummett in Blackstone *et al*., 1998). The treaty also introduced the concept of EU citizenship, allowing for greater movement and rights across member states, and established the EU's structure based on three pillars: the European Communities, Common Foreign and Security Policy, and Justice and

[23] Original text: « Le concept de « citoyenneté méritée » (earned citizenship) – développé par le très sulfureux rédacteur en chef de Prospect Magazine, David Goodheart, et [a été] repris par Gordon Brown. »

Home Affairs (Dummett in Blackstone *et al*., 1998). Despite facing considerable opposition at home, Major's government's commitment to the Maastricht Treaty was a defining moment in the United Kingdom's European journey, committing it to a path of closer union with its European partners.

This new construct of EU citizenship fundamentally transformed immigration policy in the United Kingdom by establishing the right of free movement and residency for EU citizens within the member states. The implications of this were profound, as it allowed citizens from other EU nations unprecedented mobility and access to the United Kingdom, fostering a new era of intra-European migration and socioeconomic integration. The tenure of Tony Blair's Labour government (1997-2007) further cemented the United Kingdom's role within the evolving EU framework. Blair's administration coincided with a significant phase of EU enlargement, notably the accession of several Central and Eastern European countries. Shankley and Byrne reveal:

> A significant change to the patterns of immigration to the UK has been a direct result of the expansion of the EU, initially in 2004 and then again in 2007 and 2013 respectively. … after 2004, the EU admitted new countries from central and Eastern Europe, with Cyprus, Czechia, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuanian, Malta, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia joining in 2004; followed by Bulgaria and Romania in 2007, and finally Croatia in 2013. For Britain specifically, the initial 2004 expansion resulted in a large and unexpected patterns of migration from the 'Accession 8' countries, with migrants moving in large numbers to fill employment gaps in the labour market and sectors that included the agricultural, construction and services sectors. (in Byrne *et al*., 2020: 4)

This expansion extended the privileges of free movement to the citizens of these new member states, further influencing immigration in the United Kingdom (Dummett in Blackstone *et al*., 1998). The influx of migrants from these nations brought diverse socioeconomic contributions and challenges, prompting debates over the impacts of EU immigration on the British labour market, public services, and social cohesion. Gordon Brown's premiership (2007-2010) was marked by a continued adherence to the principles of EU immigration policy, amidst growing deliberations over the socioeconomic implications of EU migration. Brown's leadership witnessed increasing public and political discourse surrounding the impacts of EU migration,

"around the same time as the financial crisis (2008 to 2012)" with "high net migration levels" intensifying scrutiny of immigration and its effects on the national economy and employment (Shankley & Byrne in Byrne *et al*., 2020: 40). David Cameron's Conservative government (2010-2016) marked another shift in the United Kingdom's approach toward the EU, especially regarding immigration. Cameron's tenure was defined by growing scepticism towards the EU, culminating in the 2016 Brexit referendum. His administration grappled with internal party divisions and public pressure over EU migration, focusing on renegotiating the United Kingdom's relationship with the EU. This period was characterised by intense debates on national sovereignty, immigration control, and the perceived strain on public services and resources due to EU migration. The United Kingdom's engagement with the EU during this period was a defining chapter in its immigration narrative, shaped by supranational policies and national sovereignty. The era reflects a complex and transformative phase in the country's approach to immigration, marked by significant policy shifts, debates on national identity and sovereignty, and the evolving discourse on the nature and consequences of European integration and mobility.

21st Century and Brexit

The dawn of the 21st century heralded a paradigmatic shift in global immigration policies, markedly influenced by heightened security imperatives following the September 11th attacks in New York City in 2001. This global reorientation towards security-centric immigration policies notably affected the United Kingdom, leading to a more stringent regulatory framework. However, the most consequential alteration in the United Kingdom's immigration landscape emerged with the 2016 EU referendum, popularly known as Brexit. This referendum, signifying a crucial juncture in British political history, effectively terminated the free movement of EU nationals into the United Kingdom and catalysed a comprehensive reassessment of immigration policies to align with the emergent economic and societal priorities in a post-Brexit context.

As aforementioned, from 1997 to 2016, British immigration policy evolved under Prime Ministers Tony Blair, Gordon Brown, and David Cameron, reflecting shifts in global security, European integration, and culminating in the pivotal Brexit referendum, highlighting issues of EU immigration and national sovereignty. Following the Brexit referendum, the onus of navigating the United Kingdom through its EU departure and reshaping its immigration framework fell on the successive Conservative governments led by Theresa May (2016-2019)

and Boris Johnson (2019-2023). May's premiership was largely defined by the intricate task of negotiating the terms of Brexit, a process that proved to be both contentious and complex. Her government's approach to immigration was inextricably linked to the broader Brexit negotiations, reflecting a commitment to ending the free movement of EU nationals—a central tenet of the Brexit campaign. During this period, May's administration undertook the challenge of delineating a post-Brexit immigration system that would cater to Britain's economic needs while addressing public concerns about immigration. This involved extensive deliberations and proposals for a future system that would balance the need for skilled workers with a more controlled immigration policy, as May shared her views on immigration in her 2015 speech to the Conservative party conference:

> We must have an immigration system that allows us to control who comes into our country. […] Britain does not need net immigration in the hundreds of thousands every year… not every person coming to Britain right now is a skilled electrician, engineer or doctor… there is no case, in the national interest, for immigration on the scale we have experienced over the last decade. (McSmith, *The Independent*, 2016)

Her reference to "net immigration in the hundreds of thousands every year" highlights a concern with the volume of immigrants, suggesting that such numbers are unsustainable or unnecessary for the country. Echoing Cameron's intentions in his 2011 speech, May intended to lower "net migration down to sustainable levels […] that is the tens of thousands" (García *et al*., 2023). May's statement stresses the urgency of attracting immigrants with specialised skills through a more regulated and selective immigration framework. She suggests that the nation should prioritise individuals whose expertise is scarce domestically yet vital for the nation's economic and social prosperity. Her focus on refining the skill profile of immigrants reflects a belief that the current approach, particularly the influx of less-skilled individuals, does not serve the nation's interests. The transition to Boris Johnson's government marked a continuation and actualisation of Brexit: "get Brexit done" (García *et al*., 2023), with a renewed focus on implementing the new immigration policies formulated under May's leadership. Johnson's administration moved towards instituting a points-based immigration system, reminiscent of models such as the skilled migration visas used in countries like Australia. As the British government attempted to regulate immigration by limiting the influx of migrants, Lassalle stresses the necessity for comprehensive, international strategies to tackle immigration and minority integration issues.

> It is becoming increasingly evident that in the United Kingdom, as elsewhere in Europe, the solutions to the challenges of immigration and the integration of minorities are more global than strictly national and fall within a broader context of aid and cooperation with the countries that drive this phenomenon.[24] (*my translation*) (2009: 123)

Lassalle states the importance of extending aid and encouraging collaboration with the nations that contribute to migration, suggesting that effective solutions transcend national boundaries.

In the wake of the unexpected decision to exit the European Union—a dominant political event that has raised questions about ethnic minority support for Brexit and its potential effects on non-white British residents—Johnson's administration took significant steps to reshape immigration policy. Specifically, the government moved towards instituting a points-based immigration system. This shift in immigration policy is particularly noteworthy in the context of the Brexit aftermath, as it represents a tangible change that could have profound implications for ethnic minorities in the United Kingdom, influencing both the demographic landscape and the broader socioeconomic environment in a post-Brexit Britain. The discourse often highlights white voters impacted by globalisation and economic downturns as primary Brexit supporters, portraying them as "'left behind'" due to socioeconomic marginalisation, leading to political disenchantment (Sobolewska & Shankley in Byrne *et al*., 2020: 200). However, this narrative tends to overlook ethnic minorities, who also face socioeconomic challenges and political alienation. Despite a general tendency for ethnic minority voters to favour remaining in the EU, variations exist across different ethnic groups, "with Indian Britons more likely to have voted Leave" (Sobolewska & Shankley in Byrne *et al*., 2020: 200). This support might stem from beliefs that post-Brexit immigration policies could be less ethnically biased, equating the treatment of white European and non-white immigrants. Research indicates that ethnic minorities feeling 'left behind' mirrored the white vote for Brexit, challenging the notion that this sentiment is exclusively white (Sobolewska & Shankley in Byrne *et al*., 2020). These findings raise questions about why ethnic minority perspectives are often excluded from broader discussions and outreach efforts addressing the 'left behind' demographic. The Brexit campaign's ethnic undertones, with a correlation between pro-leave votes among whites and

[24] Original text: « Il devient de plus en plus évident qu'au Royaume-Uni, comme partout ailleurs en Europe, les solutions aux défis de l'immigration et de l'intégration des minorités sont plus globales que strictement nationales, et qu'elles rentrent dans un contexte plus large d'aide et de coopération avec les pays qui alimentent ce phénomène. »

discomfort with ethnic diversity, suggest an ethnicised aspect to the leave vote (Sobolewska & Shankley in Byrne *et al*., 2020). Although some ethnic minority groups supported Brexit, it is anticipated to have adverse impacts on these communities, potentially hindering progress on ethnic equality—a priority for recent Conservative governments, as evidenced by initiatives like "Theresa May's Race Disparity Audit in 2017" (Sobolewska & Shankley in Byrne *et al*., 2020: 201). While the full impact of Brexit on Britain's ethnic disparities and economy remains uncertain, Sobolewska & Shankley in *Politics and representation* advise to "stay attuned to how it impacts on racial disadvantage in Britain, as well as more general effects it may have on the economy" (in Byrne *et al*., 2020: 201), bringing to light the need for continued attention to its implications for all societal sectors.

Acknowledging the uncertain impacts of Brexit provides a framework for understanding Prime Minister Rishi Sunak's articulated stance on the points-based immigration system. He emphasises that individuals aspiring to work in the United Kingdom will generally need to apply for a visa through the points-based system. Sunak asserts that the points-based system embodies fairness, emphasising its non-discriminatory nature among countries. According to him, this approach restores democratic control over immigration to the British people. In addressing illegal immigration in order to "stop the boats" (García *et al*., 2023), Sunak has introduced what is considered the most stringent anti-illegal immigration law to rebuild public trust in the fairness of the system and deter illegal boat arrivals. Expressing concern about migration levels, Sunak has remarked that they were deemed "far too high", particularly in light of official figures indicating record net migration to the country, reaching 745,000 in 2022 (BBC, 2023). Over the past 13 years, there has been a discernible shift in the stance of Conservative prime ministers: from Cameron's commitment to lowering overall immigration numbers to Sunak's stark pledge to 'stop the boats'. Despite these changes, these leaders have aimed to capitalise on and benefit from the skilled labour migrants. This system was designed to assess potential immigrants based on various criteria, including skills, education, and language proficiency, shifting the British immigration approach from the EU-centric free movement policy to a more globally oriented, merit-based system.

The establishment of the points-based system signified a substantial reorientation of British immigration policy, aiming to create a more balanced and controlled immigration environment. This system was positioned as a means to attract high-skilled workers while limiting overall immigration numbers, aligning with the government's broader objective of regaining control over immigration post-Brexit. As with the previous ones, Johnson's

government emphasised that this new system would enable the United Kingdom to better align immigration with its labour market needs to contribute to the overall economic growth and stability of the country. These policy shifts under May and Johnson's leadership were key in redefining the United Kingdom's stance on immigration in the post-EU era. The transition from a system of free movement within the EU to a points-based immigration framework marked a significant departure in the country's approach to immigration, reflecting the reshaping of the nation's immigration system amidst shifting geopolitical contexts in the aftermath of Brexit.

To summarise, in the post-World War era, the United Kingdom experienced significant demographic shifts due to an influx of immigrants from its colonies, notably during the labour shortages following both World Wars. The British Nationality Act of 1948, responding to post-World War II labour needs, facilitated this migration by granting Commonwealth citizens British nationality, sparking a wave of immigration from the Caribbean, Africa, and the Indian subcontinent. Over the decades, British immigration policy evolved, becoming more restrictive from the 1960s to the 1980s, reflecting changing societal and political landscapes. The relationship with the European Union further shaped immigration policies, especially through the Maastricht Treaty, which increased mobility within the EU. The Brexit referendum marked a major shift, ending the free movement of EU nationals and introducing a points-based immigration system. This system aimed to manage immigration more effectively in the post-Brexit era, balancing the British economic needs with public concerns about immigration levels, thereby redefining the United Kingdom's approach to immigration in a global context. The following section will explore the development and consequences of British immigration policies, emphasising their ongoing adjustments and influence on the United Kingdom's demographic and socioeconomic framework.

2.3.2. British immigration policies

Before the United Kingdom's departure from the European Union, its immigration policies were further shaped by its EU membership obligations, facilitating a relatively liberal movement of individuals within the union. However, this stance contrasted sharply with the treatment of countries outside the EU. The United Kingdom's approach towards non-EU nations was marked by progressively stringent visa protocols and the implementation of a points-based immigration system. Anne Unterreiner in *Corridor Report on the United Kingdom The immigration, emigration and diaspora policies' effects on integration: Chinese and Indian Migrants in the UK* notes:

> With 7.8 million migrants living in the country in 2013, the United Kingdom (UK) has among the largest foreign-born populations in the EU, just after Germany (10.2 million) and before France (7.5 million). (2015: 7)

Unterreiner's observation regarding the United Kingdom's migrant population, when compared with Germany and France, provides a snapshot of migration trends within the EU, suggesting a global shift towards a more managed and selective immigration framework. This comparison not only highlights the numerical significance of migrants in these countries but also implies a broader trend where nations are increasingly focusing on structured and selective approaches to immigration, reflecting changes in policy, economic demands, and social integration strategies. Unterreiner further emphasises:

> The first migration waves from India and China were comprised of relatively low-skilled migrants, and constituted migration from two countries that were highly connected to the UK. India was part of the British Empire, while the main migration flows from present-day China came from Hong Kong, a former British territory. (2015: 10)

Unterreiner's analysis of early migration waves from India and China to the United Kingdom signifies the historical and colonial connections influencing these trends, emphasising the predominance of low-skilled migrants. Niaz and Nasir's findings on the Pakistani diaspora in *The Pakistani Diaspora in UK: Evolution, Integration and Challenges* further illustrate this trend, showing a significant portion of Pakistani, Black African, and Bangladeshi immigrants in low-skilled jobs.

> […] shaped by occupational characteristics […] those who were employed, 57% of the men from Pakistani origin were engaged in low skilled jobs. They formed the highest proportion in this category followed by Black Africans (54%) and Bangladeshi men (53%). The figure was slightly higher for women i.e. around 61% (ONS, 2014). (2018: 5)

These alterations profoundly affected immigrants, notably manifested in diminished opportunities for low-skilled labour and heightened criteria for students and professionals. These observations are indicative of the United Kingdom's evolving labour market and immigration policies, which have gradually shifted towards more selective criteria. This shift has significantly impacted opportunities for low-skilled workers, while concurrently influencing the integration and socioeconomic status of immigrant communities, marking a pivotal change in how the United Kingdom navigates and structures its immigration framework and labour market dynamics.

As mentioned earlier, the evolution of British immigration policy has been characterised by substantial metamorphoses, among which the implementation of the Points-Based Immigration System (PBIS) in 2009 was a watershed moment (Salt & Bauer, 2020). The introduction of the PBIS signified a notable deviation from the United Kingdom's historically liberal immigration stance, particularly in relation to Commonwealth countries. Conceptualised to impartially evaluate and regulate migrant influx on the basis of economic utility and skill set, the PBIS represented a paradigm shift in the United Kingdom's immigration ethos. Prior to the advent of the PBIS, the United Kingdom's approach to immigration was more flexible, heavily influenced by historical ties to the Commonwealth and shaped by varying socioeconomic and political needs. In this context, the United Kingdom managed skilled labour immigration from outside the European Economic Area (EEA) using a permit system. Specific UK-based employers were authorised to sponsor identified individuals for targeted roles at designated locations, with Work Permits (UK), a unit of the UK Border Agency (UKBA), overseeing this process (Migration Advisory Committee, 2009). Additionally, the Highly Skilled Migrant Programme offered an alternative avenue for highly skilled individuals to enter the United Kingdom (Migration Advisory Committee, 2009). This period was characterised by fluctuating immigration trends, with policies often adapted in response to the immediate demands of the labour market or urgent humanitarian considerations. However, this *modus operandi* was bereft of a systematic appraisal of immigrants' skills and economic potential, engendering a spectrum of public and political perceptions regarding immigration. A

critical aspect of the PBIS was its "cessation of free movement" formerly accorded to EU nationals, thus establishing a more equitable and globally inclusive immigration architecture (Salt & Bauer, 2020: 4). This policy "applying to non-EEA citizens" (Salt & Bauer, 2020: 5), realigned immigration priorities and holds significant implications for Malaysian professionals and skilled workers, heralding new migration possibilities predicated on individual competencies rather than national origin.

The shift to a points-based immigration system was driven by economic needs to fill skill gaps in the labour market and political pressures stemming from growing public and political demand for stricter and more selective immigration policies. Furthermore, the efficacy of points-based immigration systems in nations such as Australia and Canada, which had adeptly regulated skilled migration, offered empirical frameworks for the United Kingdom to emulate. As Lassalle notes, "the Australian model (points-based system), whose main goal is to introduce a distinction between highly skilled immigrants (useful to the country and therefore desirable) and others (who are to be turned away)"[25] (*my translation*) (2009: 124). Indeed, the British PBIS drew inspiration from these models, specifically Australia's robust skill selection mechanism and incorporation of regional migration strategies focusing on high skills, and Canada's emphasis on fostering long-term economic growth and cultural diversity, coupled with a significant focus on family reunification. In adapting its immigration model, the British system notably diverged from its Australian and Canadian counterparts by emphasising the immediate needs of the labour market, while reducing the focus on family migration. Despite this shift, in 2019, Walsh reported in *Family Migration to the UK* briefing that the United Kingdom had about 9.4 million foreign-born residents, of which approximately four million, or 45%, were family migrants who had moved to join or accompany family members, accounting for 6% of the nation's total population (Walsh, 2021). Although family migration constitutes a smaller portion of the overall migrant inflows, these migrants are more likely to settle in the United Kingdom, thereby representing a significant segment of the migrant population, in contrast to work migrants or students. This approach reflects the United Kingdom's unique socioeconomic context and its strategic objectives in reformulating its immigration policy.

[25] Originial text: « le modèle australien (système à points) dont le but principal est d'introduire une distinction entre les immigrés hautement qualifiés (utiles au pays et donc désirables) et les autres (qu'il s'agit de refouler). »

The British PBIS is fundamentally structured upon the allocation of points based on several pivotal criteria, which are meticulously analysed and interwoven with the narratives of participants in section 4.4.2 of the thesis. According to the analysis of the Migration Advisory Committee (2009), at the core of the PBIS lies the emphasis on skills and qualifications, wherein applicants possessing advanced educational credentials and professional expertise, particularly those in high demand within the United Kingdom's economy, are accorded higher point scores. Language proficiency constitutes another critical element of the system. Proficiency in English to a stipulated standard is deemed indispensable, mirroring the system's commitment to fostering integration and effective communication within the British workforce. Furthermore, the remuneration associated with the prospective employment in the country is a significant determinant, with positions commanding higher salaries typically awarded more points. This aspect underscores the system's orientation towards maximising economic contribution. Finally, the possession of a job offer from a British employer, who must be a licensed sponsor, is frequently a fundamental requirement, especially for skilled work visas. This criterion ensures a direct correlation between immigration and the actual requirements of the country's labour market, which aligns migrant skills with national economic needs.

The PBIS is carefully structured into distinct tiers, each catering to specific categories of migrants, which is analytically examined in section 4.4.2. Based on the analysis of the Migration Advisory Committee (2009), Tier 1 is designated for high-value migrants, encompassing individuals like investors and those endowed with exceptional talents or skills. This tier's objective is to entice individuals deemed capable of making substantial contributions to the United Kingdom's economic or cultural tapestry. Tier 2 is tailored for skilled workers who possess a job offer within the United Kingdom, underscoring the system's concerted emphasis on ameliorating skill shortages. Tier 3, originally designated to address temporary labour shortages by admitting low-skilled workers, no longer exists, with the government having never allocated any visas under this scheme. Tier 4 is devoted to students aspiring to pursue education in the United Kingdom, merging with the nation's ambition to establish itself as a preeminent global hub for higher education. Tier 5 encompasses temporary workers and youth mobility schemes, facilitating a spectrum of short-term employment and cultural exchange prospects. The application protocol under PBIS is multi-staged. Initially, applicants are required to ascertain their eligibility against the fundamental criteria pertinent to their visa category, such as requisite skills, qualifications, and job offer. Following this, points are computed based on these qualifications, in conjunction with the remuneration of the job offer

and the applicant's proficiency in the English language. The subsequent phase involves submitting necessary documentation and completing application forms, typically via an online interface. The culmination of this process is the evaluation and decision by the United Kingdom Home Office, which, if favourable, culminates in the visa's issuance. This procedure strives for objectivity and transparency, albeit it has been subjected to critiques regarding its intricacy and the challenges associated with its accessibility. The implementation of the PBIS has notably influenced the composition and volume of immigration to the United Kingdom. The system's design, which prioritises skilled and highly qualified individuals, has led to a shift in the demographics of the migrant population. There has been an increase in skilled migrants from a wider range of countries, diversifying the immigrant population. This shift reflects the system's objective of addressing specific skill shortages within the British labour market. However, it has also led to concerns about the reduced inflow of lower-skilled workers, who are essential in certain sectors of the economy.

The implementation of this system has exerted a profound influence on the British labour market. By prioritising the admission of skilled and qualified migrants, the system has played a fundamental role in bridging critical skill gaps, notably in sectors such as healthcare, technology, and engineering. This strategic channelling of skilled labour has been instrumental in mitigating the dearth of domestic talent in key industries. The economic contributions of these skilled immigrants are significant; they frequently occupy roles that catalyse innovation and productivity, thereby bolstering the growth of the United Kingdom's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) (Migration Advisory Committee, 2009). Yet, the system's predilection for high-skilled labour potentially marginalises the contributions of lower-skilled workers, who are indispensable in several economic sectors. The repercussions of the PBIS on vital public services, including healthcare and education, are multifaceted. On one hand, skilled immigrants enhance these sectors as professionals, enriching service provision. On the other hand, the discourse surrounding the consumption of these services by immigrants encapsulates a complex matrix of socioeconomic factors. The social and cultural ramifications of the PBIS are also noteworthy. Its emphasis on skilled immigration underpins the integration of immigrants into British society, notably through the English language proficiency requirement. This approach offers advantages for social cohesion and cultural diversity. However, it concurrently raises concerns about the system's inclusivity, particularly in relation to migrants from diverse linguistic and cultural milieus. Moreover, the PBIS significantly influences public

perceptions of immigration, mirroring and often shaping broader societal attitudes towards migrants and the ethos of multiculturalism.

Despite its structured objectivity, the PBIS has been subjected to scrutiny over concerns of fairness and inherent biases. One significant critique is the perceived economic bias, wherein the system appears to disproportionately favour individuals with higher economic resources or from affluent backgrounds (Unterreiner, 2015; Niaz & Nasir, 2018; Byrne *et al*., 2020). The trend that Indian immigrants are predominantly highly skilled can be attributed to the stringent qualification and salary thresholds set by the immigration system, as Unterreiner elucidates.

> [T]he majority of current Indian migrants seem to be highly skilled people. Past research and census data show an important evolution in this population since the 1950s. They currently show good indicators of integration, such as high levels of education. (2015: 15)

This reflects a significant evolution since the 1950s, with current data showing that Indian immigrants not only integrate well, as evidenced by high education levels, but also secure high-ranking positions within the workforce. Specifically, she reports:

> [D]ue to the policy targeting highly skilled migrants, Chinese and Indian migrants occupy high-ranking positions once they are hired: 52.7% of Indian-born and 46.4% of Chinese-born migrants occupy an ISCO 1-3 position, compared to 42.8% of the British born. (2015: 25)

This indicates successful integration and significant economic contributions from these migrants. However, it also prompts a closer look at the domestic workforce's readiness and the broader social implications of such a policy, including its sustainability and its impacts on job competition and societal perceptions of immigrants. Additionally, the system's preference for high-skilled labour, potentially neglecting lower-skilled workers who are crucial in sectors like agriculture and hospitality, presents a further point of contention, accentuating the need to balance the economic benefits of attracting high-skilled migrants with the essential roles lower-skilled workers fulfil in the economy.

The system's stringent criteria also present formidable challenges for refugees and asylum seekers, who may not fulfil these requirements despite their potential to contribute and the humanitarian aspects involved. Support for refugee initiatives plays a crucial role in their integration, emphasising the development of social connections and community ties, which

stand in contrast to strategies that predominantly focus on economic self-sufficiency. The "need to expand the size of refugee resettlement programmes" ensures that they not only accommodate more individuals but also provide a holistic approach to resettlement that values and nurtures the social and economic well-being of refugees (Phillimore *et al*., 2021: 1). UNHCR, a UN Refugee Agency dedicated to saving lives, upholding rights, and fostering a brighter future for those who flee their homes due to war and persecution, has developed a strategy to increase the number of resettlement slots and broaden the group of countries participating in resettlement efforts (www.unhcr.org). Leveraging modest resettlement programs initiated in the 2000s, the United Kingdom has committed to advancing its initiatives. A key component of this commitment is the Community Sponsorship Scheme (CSS), designed to assist refugee families by connecting them with a supportive volunteer network, facilitating their integration into the community (Phillimore *et al*., 2021). The scheme not only focuses on providing employment opportunities within the PBIS framework but also encourages integration processes for refugees, ensuring they receive well-rounded support in their new environment (Phillimore *et al*., 2021).

As elucidated earlier, the PBIS distinctly privileges individuals possessing high levels of skill and academic qualifications. What does this imply for Malaysians aspiring to migrate to the United Kingdom? It implies that Malaysian citizens with advanced degrees, professional qualifications, and skills in high-demand sectors like healthcare, engineering, and IT in the United Kingdom have increased opportunities to migrate. This essentially narrows down the pool to individuals who are mostly from a range of middle-class to upper-class families. On the other hand, Malaysians without these qualifications face more challenges in obtaining visas, based on the premise that visa policies often favour applicants with certain qualifications. A critical component of the PBIS is English language proficiency. While English is extensively used in Malaysia and incorporated into the educational system, this element of the PBIS may predominantly favour a subset of Malaysian applicants. Specifically, those residing in urban areas where English usage is more prevalent could have an advantage. However, this advantage may not extend to individuals in rural regions in Malaysia, who might exhibit greater proficiency in native languages such as Malay, Chinese, or Indian languages. The relative lack of English practice in these areas could potentially result in a weaker command of the language compared to their urban counterparts. Thus, the benefits of the PBIS's emphasis on English proficiency may not be uniformly distributed across all Malaysian applicants and may depend largely on their socioeconomic status. For Malaysian students aspiring for higher education in

the United Kingdom, the Tier 4 (Student) Visa under the PBIS presents a relatively streamlined application process, contingent upon their fulfilment of the requisite criteria (refer to section 4.4.2). The United Kingdom continues to be a sought-after educational destination for Malaysian students (examined in 2.2.5), with the PBIS incorporating clauses for post-study work opportunities, enhancing its appeal.

Malaysians whose skill sets are congruent with the labour market exigencies of the United Kingdom could find the PBIS particularly beneficial. For instance, Malaysian professionals in healthcare, technology, or other fields grappling with skill scarcities in the United Kingdom may experience bolstered prospects under this regime. However, the system's emphasis on salary levels as a determinant in point allocation poses potential challenges. While skilled Malaysian professionals may meet these financial thresholds, individuals employed in less remunerative sectors could find this criterion to be a substantial barrier. This does not imply that securing visas is impossible; however, the complexities of the process may be amplified, necessitating a more comprehensive set of procedures. However, the complexities of the process may be amplified, necessitating a more comprehensive set of procedures. The Malaysian diaspora, with its rich cultural heritage, significantly aids the integration of new Malaysian immigrants through shared language and historical Commonwealth connections. Such commonalities often render the United Kingdom's diverse culture more accessible and welcoming to Malaysians, in contrast to immigrants from non-English speaking backgrounds. Nonetheless, the PBIS, with its emphasis on high-skilled migrants, may inadvertently restrict the heterogeneity of Malaysian immigration flows.

In parallel, ethnocentrically biased policies in Malaysia, especially those pertaining to education and professional advancement, exert a significant influence—as push factors—on migration patterns. A prime example is the Malaysia Education Blueprint 2015-2025, a comprehensive plan developed by the Ministry of Higher Education in Malaysia (Ministry of Education Malaysia portal, 2015), which aims to cultivate a global outlook among Malaysian youth. It acknowledges the significant advancements made by the Malaysian higher education system in recent years, including increased student enrolment, international recognition for research and patents, and its status as a favoured destination for international students. Nonetheless, it also brings to the surface the necessity for continuous evolution of the system to keep pace with, or even surpass, global trends, ultimately contributing to Malaysia's goal of becoming a high-income nation, thereby augmenting Malaysians' inclination towards overseas education and skilled employment, with the United Kingdom being a notable destination.

To conclude, the post-Brexit era has fundamentally redefined the United Kingdom's immigration framework, with significant implications for global migration patterns, impacting not only Malaysia but also India, China, African and Caribbean countries, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and other nations. The shift towards a more internationally inclusive immigration system through the adoption of a points-based approach, reflects the United Kingdom's strategic reorientation in a post-EU context. This transition is not just a domestic alteration but a reflection of the nation's response to broader global dynamics, including economic, diplomatic, and educational factors. The resultant migration trends exemplified by a decrease in EU migrants and an increase from non-EU countries expose the immediate effects of these policy reforms. While these changes open new possibilities for professionals and students from these countries, they also introduce challenges, amplified by global issues such as the pandemic and international conflicts. A proactive strategy entails staying informed and adapting to the changing contours of British immigration, acknowledging its impact on individual ambitions and wider international relationships in the aftermath of Brexit and the pandemic. This understanding sets the stage for a deeper exploration into the evolving migration trends and patterns within the United Kingdom in the following section.

2.3.3. Migration trends and patterns in the United Kingdom

Migration has fundamentally transformed the United Kingdom's cultural and social landscape, creating a society rich in diversity. Darwin puts forward:

> By the time the era of mass migration arrived in the 1840s and 1850s, the British at home were already a nation of movers and settlers: from region to region, from village to town, from all over Britain to the metropolis in London. Migration, like charity, began at home. (2012: 99)

The British populace was already accustomed to mobility and resettlement long before the onset of mass migration in the mid-19th century. His observation that "[m]igration, like charity, began at home" signifies a tradition of internal migration from various regions to more urban centres, particularly London, setting the groundwork for a culturally and socially diverse society. From my own viewpoint, Darwin's perspective of a longstanding tradition of mobility encompasses not only British "movers and settlers" but can also be extended to immigrants who might mobilise internally.

Ethnic minority demographic in the United Kingdom

Darwin's view seamlessly transitions to an exploration of how Britain's ethnic minority communities have been shaped by the country's imperial history, decolonisation, global conflicts, and globalisation, influencing the settlement patterns and demographics of these populations in the United Kingdom. As explored earlier, the post-war period saw a significant influx of non-white immigrants, particularly from the Caribbean and the Indian subcontinent, driven by labour shortages in Britain and facilitated by colonial ties. Caribbean immigrants, for instance, were instrumental in forming the Black Caribbean ethnic category, moving to the United Kingdom under their British subject status (refer to section 2.2.1). Similarly, substantial migration from the Indian subcontinent added to the nation's ethnic diversity, with many South Asian immigrants, "Indians, Pakistanis and migrating in large numbers" settling in northern English towns due to labour demands, according to Shankley *et al*., in *The demography of ethnic minorities in Britain* (in Byrne *et al*., 2020: 17). The table provided by the ONS 2021 census in Figure 3 of the preeminent non-British demographic in the United Kingdom revealed that India held the distinction of being the predominant country of birth for immigrants in the United Kingdom, boasting an estimated 896,000 Indian-born individuals (Vargas-Silva & Rienzo, 2022). Pakistan contributed significantly to the United Kingdom's demographic composition, with approximately 456,000 individuals, primarily drawn by familial

considerations (ONS, 2021). The 1970s saw a second wave of South Asian migration from East Africa, driven by discriminatory policies in African nations "where they were subjected to Africanisation policies" choosing "African citizens over Asians" (Shankley *et al*. in Byrne *et al*., 2020: 17). These policies expulsed many and rendered them "refugees coming to Britain due to colonial connections" (Shankley *et al*. in Byrne *et al*., 2020: 17). This noteworthy influx of East African-Asians, primarily possessing British passports due to their status as former British subjects settled in overseas colonies, migrated to the United Kingdom from Kenya and Uganda.

Table 1: Population of the UK for the five most common non-UK countries of birth and nationalities, year ending June 2021

Country of Birth			Nationality		
Country	**Estimate**	**Confidence Interval (±)**	**Country**	**Estimate**	**Confidence Interval (±)**
India	896	52	Poland	696	46
Poland	682	46	India	370	34
Pakistan	456	37	Republic of Ireland	370	34
Republic of Ireland	412	35	Italy	342	32
Germany	347	32	Romania	342	32

Source: Office for National Statistics - Annual Population Survey (APS)

Notes

1. Estimates are in thousands.
2. Estimates use Labour Force Survey responses that have been reweighted to new population counts.

Figure 3: Non-UK born population. Annual Population Survey data from the ONS

The White Irish group, with migration dating back to the 1740s, saw significant numbers moving to Britain during the potato famine in the 1840s, "where they found work in mining, shipbuilding, engineering and linen production (MacRaild, 1999)" (Shankley *et al*. in Byrne *et al*., 2020: 17). This pattern, with 412, 000 individuals, continues "to the present day, with many Irish people moving to Britain for work, lifestyle and education reasons" (Shankley *et al*. in Byrne *et al*., 2020: 17; ONS, 2021). The ethnic Chinese population in Britain, primarily originating from Hong Kong, reflects Britain's historical connections, with recent migrations from "Mainland China, Taiwan, Vietnam, Singapore and Malaysia" (Shankley *et al*. in Byrne *et al*., 2020: 18), with individuals from China: 208, 229, Vietnam: 35, 168, and Singapore: 54, 357, adding to this diversity (ONS, 2021). In contrast, the Malaysian community in the United Kingdom, though more modest in size, holds significance. To delineate, the Malaysian community in the United Kingdom, albeit smaller, remains noteworthy: the 2001 census

documented 49,886 individuals born in Malaysia. The ONS estimated that by 2017, approximately 75,000 Malaysian-born expatriates had established residence in the United Kingdom. Furthermore, data from 2013 indicate that a noteworthy segment of 14,500 Malaysians were enrolled in tertiary-level education in the United Kingdom (Foreign & Commonwealth Office), underlining the country's role as a preferred destination for Malaysian academic pursuits. In the 2021 census, approximately 78,736 Malaysians now reside in the United Kingdom. Additionally, there has been a notable increase in African migration since the 1990s, leading to the introduction of the 'Black African' category in United Kingdom censuses and surveys (Shankley *et al*. in Byrne *et al*., 2020). EU expansion significantly altered the nation's demographic landscape, with a surge in immigrants from 13 countries in Central and Eastern Europe post-2004, contributing to the 'White Other' category (Shankley *et al*. in Byrne *et al*., 2020). Poland, as the second most prevalent group, contributed around 696,000 individuals, many of whom migrated in pursuit of employment opportunities, particularly following Poland's accession to the EU in 2004 (Vargas-Silva & Rienzo, 2022). These new migration flows, influenced by labour market needs and specific recruitment schemes, have reshaped Britain's ethnic categorisations and challenged traditional understandings of ethnicity in the country.

Age groups

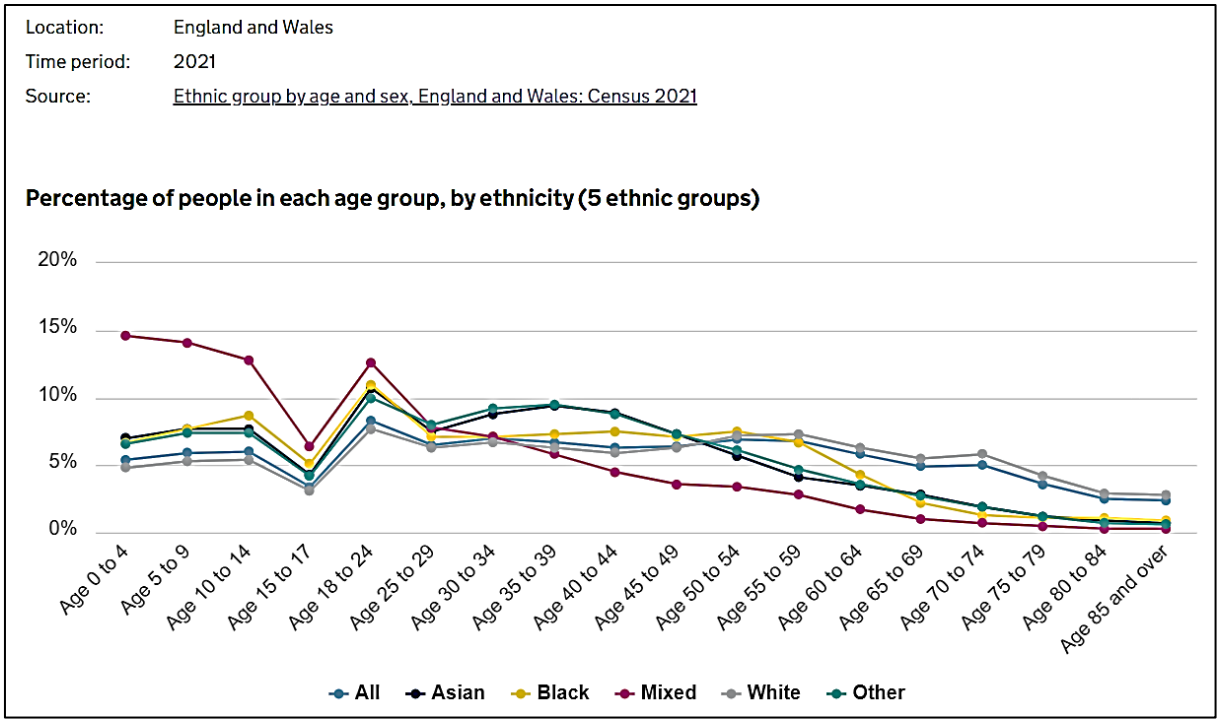

Figure 4: Ethnicity by age group. Source: Annual Population Survey data, 2021 ONS Census

According to Shankley *et al*. (2020), research has highlighted that the diverse age profiles of ethnic minorities in the United Kingdom are significantly influenced by their distinct immigration histories. They note that half of the population born abroad and residing in England and Wales arrived in the United Kingdom at ages 15–29, underlining how age structure is crucial for various societal aspects like education, employment, family formation, fertility, and health (Shankley *et al*. in Byrne *et al*., 2020). The younger age profile of most ethnic minority groups compared to the White British majority is linked to migration theories suggesting younger, healthier individuals are more likely to migrate for education and work. This trend aligns with labour market demands and the resilience required to endure the migration process. Younger migrants tend to be more economically active and less dependent on state benefits, reflecting a selective migration pattern that emphasises the vitality and productivity of this demographic. In the 2021 census in Figure 4, the average age of individuals in England and Wales was recorded at 40 years. An analysis of the data showed significant variations in average ages across different ethnic groups in England and Wales. White ethnic groups had the highest average age at 43 years, while mixed ethnic groups had the lowest at 19 years. Among the 19 ethnic groups, white Irish had the highest average age at 54 years, whereas mixed white and Asian and mixed white and black African groups had the youngest average ages, both at 16 years. The population distribution by age was also noteworthy, with 29.1% (17.3 million) of people under 25 years old, 20.2% (12.0 million) between 25 and 39 years, 26.3% (15.6 million) from 40 to 59 years, and 24.4% (14.5 million) aged 60 years and over. Among the aggregated ethnic groups, individuals from mixed ethnic backgrounds had the highest proportion, 60.5%, under the age of 25. Conversely, 27.6% of white individuals were 60 years or older, marking the highest percentage in this age category across the five main ethnic groupings (Asian, black, white, mixed, and 'other').

This youthful age structure, as highlighted by Shankley *et al.* (in Byrne *et al*., 2020), has broader societal implications, influencing education, employment, and health trends. The study contrasts the younger age profiles of ethnic minorities with the older age profile of the White British majority, attributing this to migration patterns where younger, healthier individuals are more likely to migrate for better opportunities, aligning with labour market needs and the challenges of migration. This results in a demographic where immigrants are predominantly economically active and less reliant on state support. The 2021 census data corroborate this, showing a stark variation in average ages across ethnic groups, with White ethnic groups being the oldest on average and mixed ethnic groups the youngest. In a detailed examination that I

provide of Malaysians residing in the United Kingdom, Figure 8 from section 4.2 offers insightful statistical data on the age distribution of the researched participants, disclosing a diverse age range among the participants, spanning from 20 to 70 years. The data indicate a predominant age group, with a substantial 33% of the respondents in their 40s, closely followed by 31% in their 30s, showcasing a significant concentration of individuals in the prime of their working and family life. Additionally, a smaller yet notable portion of the population, 8%, is in their 50s, and 7% are young adults in their 20s, demonstrating a wide array of life stages within the Malaysian community. The representation diminishes for older age groups, with only 2% each in their 60s and 70s. Interestingly, 16% of the participants opted not to disclose their age. This distribution pattern suggests that the majority, over three-quarters, of the Malaysian diaspora under study are predominantly in their 30s and 40s, indicating a demographic skew towards a more youthful and potentially economically active segment, while those in their 60s and 70s constitute a smaller fraction, under a quarter of the population researched. The youthful age structure observed among ethnic minorities in the United Kingdom, as analysed by Shankley *et al*., reflects broader societal trends that also resonate within the Malaysian community. The detailed age distribution data for Malaysians divulge a similar youthful and economically active demographic, with a significant majority in their 30s and 40s, aligning with the broader patterns of migration and societal integration highlighted in the national census.

Ethnicity by regions

Areas of England and Wales by ethnicity

Geography	Asian	Black	Mixed	White British	White other	Other
	%	%	%	%	%	%
East Midlands	8.0	2.7	2.4	79.6	6.1	1.3
East of England	6.4	2.9	2.8	78.5	8.0	1.4
London	20.7	13.5	5.7	36.8	17.0	6.3
North East	3.7	1.0	1.3	90.6	2.5	1.0
North West	8.4	2.3	2.2	81.2	4.4	1.5
South East	7.0	2.4	2.8	78.8	7.5	1.5
South West	2.8	1.2	2.0	87.8	5.3	0.9
Wales	2.9	0.9	1.6	90.6	3.3	0.9
West Midlands	13.3	4.5	3.0	71.8	5.2	2.1
Yorkshire and The Humber	8.9	2.1	2.1	80.9	4.5	1.4

Table 1: Areas of England and Wales by ethnicity. Source: 2021 ONS Census

The census data illustrate Britain's increasing ethnic diversity, particularly in England, where the bulk of ethnic minority groups reside. However, the distribution of these groups is not uniform across the country, being influenced by factors such as migration history, labour market needs, housing availability and affordability, and challenges like discrimination. Traditionally, ethnic minorities have primarily settled in inner-city urban areas, and while there has been some movement towards suburban areas, their presence in rural and suburban settings remains lower compared to urban ones (Shankley *et al*. in Byrne *et al*., 2020). The choice of residence for newer migrants is often influenced by social connections, the appeal of diverse neighbourhoods, and the availability of housing and employment opportunities. An intriguing trend is the migration patterns of individuals from new EU accession countries, who have settled in areas not traditionally associated with large-scale immigration, like the east of England (Shankley *et al*. in Byrne *et al*., 2020). This movement has been driven by labour demands in sectors like agriculture, with businesses often providing housing due to shortages. This shift indicates a changing association between ethnic minorities and their preferred locales, with settlements expanding from urban centres to include suburban and rural areas.

The 2021 Census data in Table 1 present a comprehensive snapshot of the ethnic composition across England and Wales, highlighting significant regional disparities in ethnic diversity. London stands out as a mosaic of multiculturalism, with nearly half of its population comprising Asian, black, mixed, or other ethnic groups, in addition to a notable 17% who identify as white ethnic minorities. This diversity reflects London's status as a global city, attracting a vast array of cultures, which collectively contribute to its dynamic and cosmopolitan character. In contrast, the Northeast represents the other end of the spectrum, showcasing minimal ethnic diversity with only 7% of its population identifying with non-white ethnic groups. This low diversity may be attributed to historical migration patterns, economic factors, and possibly the region's less globalised economy compared to London. The data also reveal that the Northeast and Wales have the highest proportion of residents identifying as White British, tying at 90.6%. This statistic is a stark contrast to London's 36.8%, illustrating how regional identities and demographics in the United Kingdom vary significantly. When it comes to specific ethnic groups, London and the West Midlands lead in diversity. London's significant Asian and black populations (20.7% and 13.5%, respectively) are indicative of its longstanding ties to these communities, bolstered by historical and contemporary migration flows. The West Midlands, particularly Birmingham, boasts a history of immigration from Commonwealth countries, which is reflected in its substantial Asian and black demographics. Conversely, the Southwest and Wales report the lowest percentages of Asian populations, and the Northeast and Wales have the lowest percentages of black residents. These figures may reflect a combination of factors, including historical settlement patterns, local economies, and the pull of metropolitan areas like London for newer immigrants. The higher percentages of mixed-ethnicity individuals in London and the West Midlands compared to the Northeast and Wales further underscore the metropolitan areas' roles as hubs of cultural convergence and interaction. This census data not only showcase the ethnic diversity present in England and Wales but also highlight the influence of regional histories, economies, and migration patterns on the demographic landscape. London's position as a global city is reflected in its diverse demographic profile, while other regions exhibit varying degrees of diversity influenced by their unique historical and socioeconomic contexts.

Based on the statistical data of the Malaysian participants (figure in 4.2), a detailed glimpse into the residential patterns of Malaysians in the United Kingdom, particularly highlighting a significant concentration in England, can be observed. An overwhelming 78% of these participants reside in England, with a notable majority of 58% living in London and

Greater London. This indicates a strong preference or inclination for Malaysians to settle in the capital region, attributed to various factors, including economic opportunities, educational institutions, community networks, and the vibrancy and multicultural environment that London offers. The distribution extends beyond the capital, with 12% of participants living in the North and Northwest regions of England, suggesting a presence in cities like Manchester and Liverpool, which are known for their diverse populations and opportunities. Meanwhile, 11% reside in Scotland and Northern Ireland, indicating a more dispersed Malaysian community across the United Kingdom, influenced by factors such as education, employment, or personal connections. The South and Southeast regions host 7.5% of the participants in my research, areas typically associated with a higher quality of living, scenic landscapes, and historical cities, but perhaps with fewer Malaysians compared to London. This distribution paints a picture of a community that, while concentrated in urban and economically active areas, also has a presence across various regions of the United Kingdom, each with its unique attractions and opportunities. The focus on London reflects broader migration patterns where ethnic minorities, including Malaysians, are drawn to major cities for their resources, networks, and multicultural milieu. However, the spread across other regions also suggests a diversification of Malaysian residency, influenced by a range of factors from job opportunities to educational pursuits and family ties.

This section focuses on the United Kingdom's transformation through migration, tracing back to internal movements before the mid-19th century mass migration era. It details the profound impact of post-war immigration from the Caribbean and the Indian subcontinent on the nation's ethnic diversity, driven by labour needs and colonial ties. The influx of East African Asians and post-EU expansion East European immigrants further diversified the demographic. The younger age profile of these immigrant groups, in contrast with the White British majority, is linked to education and employment, reflecting an evolving labour market. The distribution of ethnic minorities across the nation shows a shift from traditional urban centres to a broader geographic spread, with London as a key multicultural hub. The discussion extends to the Malaysian community, showcasing the broader narrative of migration, integration, and cultural landscape shaping in the United Kingdom. In the upcoming section, it will explore the array of obstacles that immigrants encounter as they adapt to life in their host country, detailing their experiences with social, economic, and cultural integration.

2.3.4. Socioeconomic implications

Impact on the labour market and economy

The British labour market has been significantly influenced by immigration, often benefiting from diverse skill sets in sectors like healthcare, technology, and academia. While there are concerns about the impact on employment rates and wages of native workers, the consensus in academic literature, as shown in studies from Wadsworth *et al.*'s *Brexit and the Impact of Immigration on the UK* (2016) is that immigration has a neutral to slightly positive effect on the labour market, contributing to economic dynamism and flexibility. Their analysis revealed that between 1995 and 2015, the United Kingdom experienced a significant increase in the number of immigrants from other European Union (EU) countries. They explain that EU immigrants in the United Kingdom are generally younger, more educated, and more likely to be employed compared to the UK-born population. Approximately 44% of EU immigrants have received higher education, in contrast to 23% of British natives. Additionally, a significant portion of these immigrants, around a third, settle in London, a much higher proportion compared to the 11% of the UK-born population residing in the capital.

The impact of immigration on the local workforce is a contentious issue. Some argue that it increases job competition, potentially lowering wages for UK-born workers. However, immigrants also contribute to economic demand and bring complementary skills to the workforce. Recent studies have shown that areas with significant increases in EU immigration did not experience greater declines in employment or wages among the UK-born (Wadsworth et al., 2016). According to Wadsworth et al., economic downturns observed post-2008 were attributed more to the global financial crisis rather than immigration. Furthermore, there is minimal evidence to suggest that EU immigration exacerbates income inequality or reduces job opportunities for lower-skilled UK-born workers. Immigrants, particularly from the EU, contribute more in taxes than they receive in welfare benefits, thus positively impacting the country's budget deficit (Wadsworth *et al*., 2016). They also do not adversely affect local services, including crime rates, education, health, or social housing. The freedom of movement within the Single Market is a principle that applies to all member states, including non-EU countries like Norway and Switzerland that have access to it (Wadsworth *et al*., 2016).

Explored in section 2.3.3, immigrants, particularly in their working age, contribute significantly to the labour force, influencing the dependency ratio and simultaneously bolstering both the supply of labour and aggregate demand within the economy. The economic

impact of migration, explored by Wadsworth *et al*., (2016) and Shankley *et al*. (in Byrne *et al*., 2020), encompasses various facets of the economy as immigrants increase overall spending, which, in turn, stimulates a surge in labour demand linked to heightened economic activity. The phenomenon linking migration, labour markets, and economic growth highlights a tendency for net migration to contribute positively to the real GDP of the host country, as Wadsworth *et al*. elaborates:

> Higher immigration has increased overall national income (more workers will generate more GDP) and has benefited the immigrants who have come to the UK since, by and large, they are better off than in their country of origin. (2016: 2)

The assertion implies a positive correlation between immigration and economic growth, suggesting that immigration not only enhances the workforce but also boosts overall productivity and economic performance. Furthermore, the statement touches on the benefits to immigrants themselves, noting that they are generally better off in the United Kingdom compared to their countries of origin. This suggests that the economic opportunities available in the country, including potentially higher wages, better living conditions, or improved social services, provide significant advantages to immigrants. This dual benefit of immigration underscores its mutual value: it fosters economic growth in the host country while also enhancing the standard of living for immigrants. This dynamic exemplifies the far-reaching economic implications of migration, benefiting both individual migrants and the wider economy.

Fernández-Reino and Brindle analyse the British workforce in *Migrants in the UK labour market: an overview* (2024). They established that 6.2 million foreign-born individuals constituted nearly a fifth of the entire working population. Employment trends revealed a higher likelihood of migrant men being employed compared to their UK-born counterparts, whereas migrant women showed a lower employment rate. The COVID-19 pandemic had a pronounced impact on unemployment rates for both migrants and UK-born individuals, with a sharp increase observed during the pandemic. However, according to Fernández-Reino and Brindle's research, unemployment rates had mostly stabilised back to pre-pandemic levels by the end of 2022. Contrary to views that immigrants are a burden on the country's social welfare system, unemployed migrants were less inclined to claim unemployment benefits than the UK-born unemployed. This is explained by the fact that some "migrants are not eligible to claim

benefits" or "migrant workers who are eligible to receive unemployment benefits may not understand their entitlements or may be unfamiliar with the process of claiming or visiting job centres" (Fernández-Reino & Brindle, 2024: 8). Employment rates varied significantly among non-EU-born immigrants, with those seeking asylum showing lower employment levels compared to those who migrated for employment, family, or study reasons. Immigrants were disproportionately represented in certain sectors, notably hospitality (12%) and transport and storage (14%) for individuals from Pakistan and other South Asian regions. Meanwhile, migrants from India (17%) were significantly employed in information, communication, and IT sectors. A stark observation can be made regarding employment in the health and care sector, where 29% of Sub-Saharan Africans and 22% of East and Southeast Asians were employed,

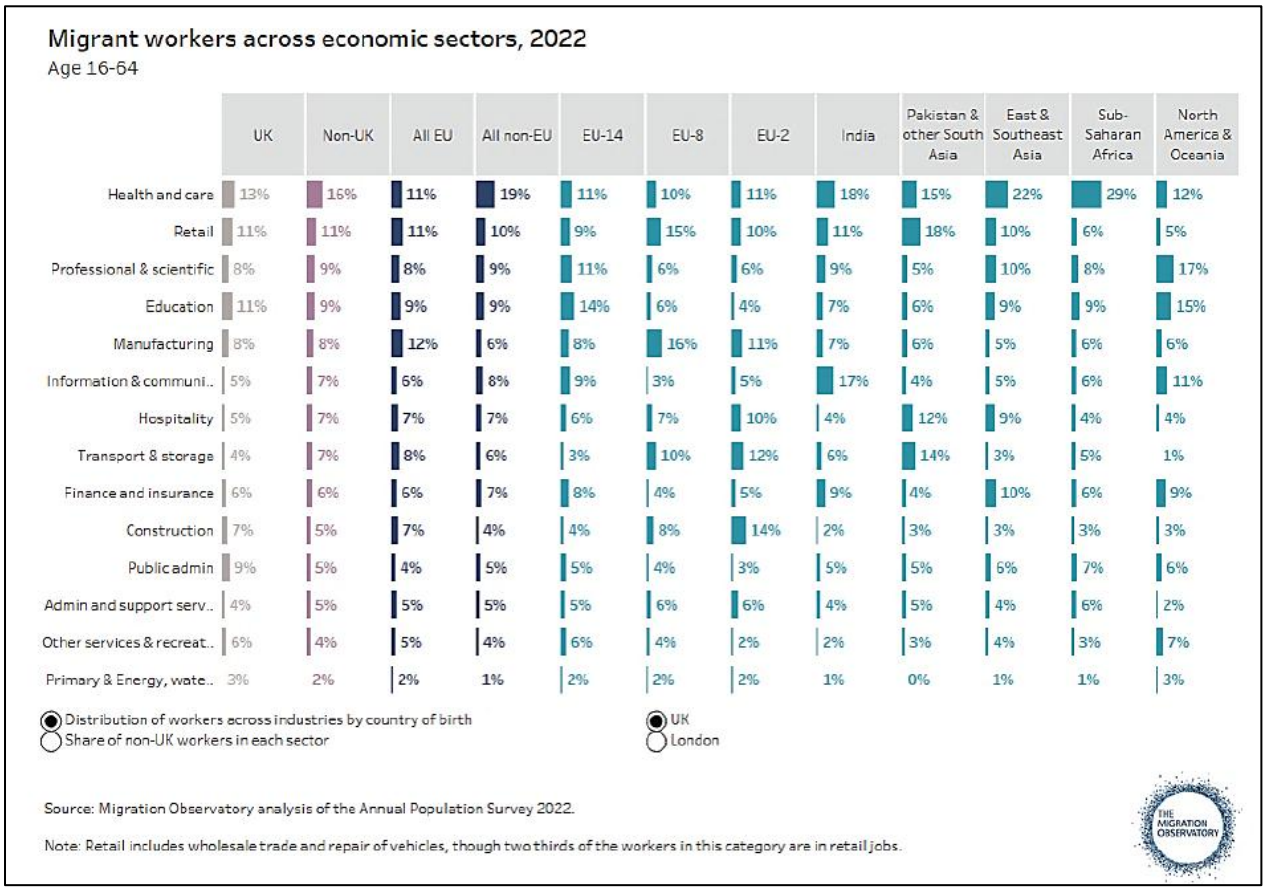

Figure 5: Migrant workers across economic sectors. Source: Migration Observatory UK, Annual Population Survey, 2022

compared to 13% of UK-born and 11% of EU nationals. Furthermore, an interesting distinction in employment was observed based on origin: migrants from North America and Oceania (54%) and India (53%) were more likely to engage in high-skilled occupations compared to

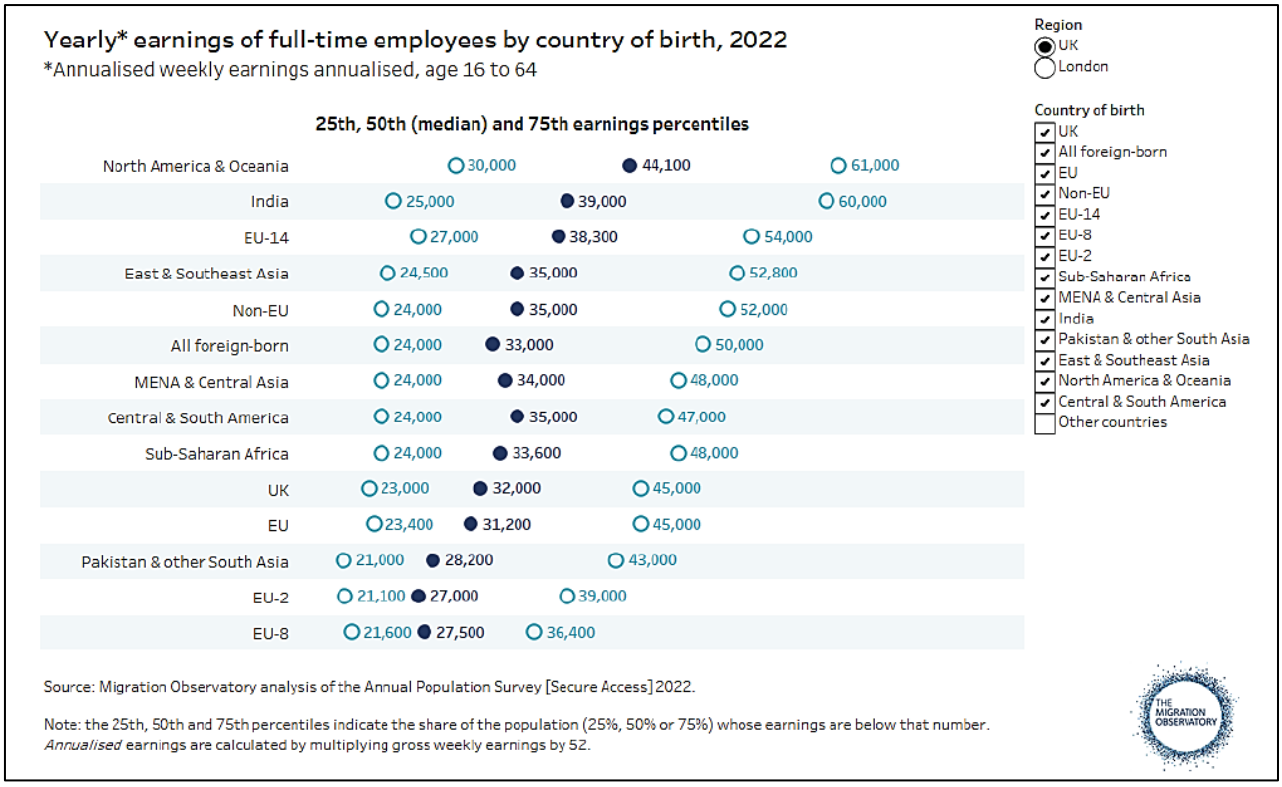

Figure 6: Yearly earnings of full-time employees by country of birth. Source: Migration Observatory UK, Annual Population Survey, 2022

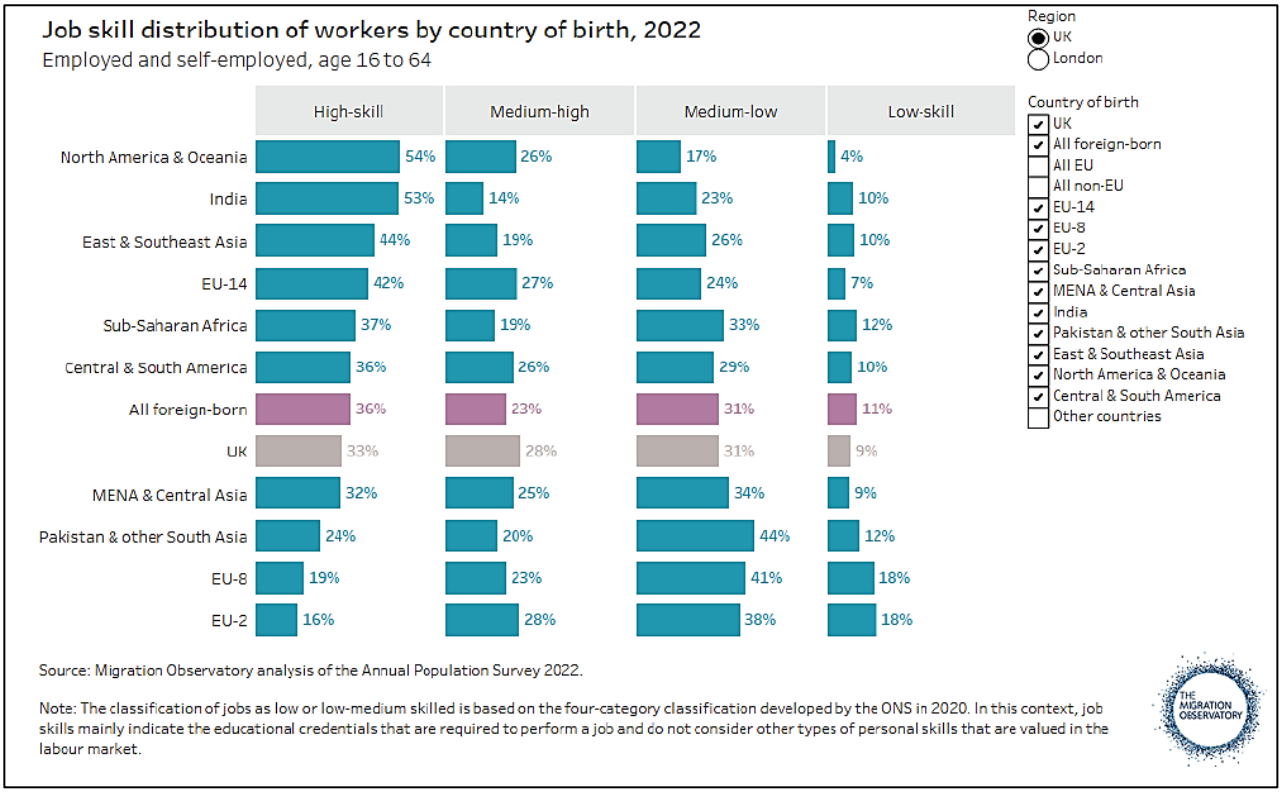

Figure 7: Job skill distribution of workers by country of birth. Source: Migration Observatory UK, Annual Population Survey, 2022

the UK-born (33%), while those from new EU member states (EU-2 and EU-8) were often

employed in lower-skilled jobs.

In terms of wages, employees from North America, Oceania, and India had the highest average wages in 2022. Despite their high educational levels, many migrant workers were found to be overqualified for their positions, according to Fernández-Reino and Brindle. Ho aligns with Fernández-Reino and Brindle in *Migration trajectories of 'highly skilled' middling transnationals: Singaporean transmigrants in London* on the Singaporean diaspora, noting that:

> Migration trajectories by studying the experiences of middling transnationals who sought out a variety of visa strategies to extend their migration experience. At the time of the interviews, these individuals held visas testifying to their highly valued skills. However, their biographies revealed practical difficulties, emotional vulnerabilities and a period of employment that was not commensurate with their skills. (2011: 23)

The analysis by Fernández-Reino, Brindle, and Ho enunciates the paradox faced by many migrant workers, particularly from the Singaporean diaspora in London, who, despite possessing high educational qualifications, often find themselves in jobs for which they are overqualified. This phenomenon is not solely attributable to a lack of opportunity but is deeply intertwined with the complex migration trajectories of these transnationals. These individuals employ various visa strategies to prolong their stay, reflecting a proactive engagement with migration policies. Despite holding visas that recognise their high skill levels, their actual employment experiences reveal an inaccurate mismatch between their qualifications and job roles. This discrepancy accentuates migration issues such as the "practical difficulties, emotional vulnerabilities", and the struggle to find employment that aligns with their skill set, painting a picture of the skilled migrant's journey, integration and employment in the context of transnational migration. Furthermore, Fernández-Reino and Brindle's analysis highlights that workers from South Asian countries (excluding India) were more likely to be in part-time roles due to the unavailability of full-time positions, in contrast to UK-born workers. This disparity further supports evidence of the systemic hurdles faced by migrants in achieving equitable integration within the labour market.

In the broader context of Britain's labour market, the impact of immigration affects different segments of the workforce and various sectors in distinct ways. Studies such as those by Dustmann *et al*. in *The Effect of Immigration along the Distribution of Wages* (2013) reveal

that immigration does not homogeneously affect wage distribution across the board. While low-wage workers may experience wage suppression due to increased competition, medium- and high-wage workers might see wage growth, indicative of the complementary relationship between immigrant and native workers in these segments. The examination of the effects of foreign-born workers in the NHS and the broader labour market in Britain illustrates immigration's impact on employment and wages. Foreign-born healthcare professionals are crucial to the NHS, bringing essential skills and ensuring the system's functionality while delivering vital services to a diverse patient base. This highlights the indispensable role these workers play in maintaining the quality and accessibility of healthcare in the United Kingdom. The research by Dustmann *et al*. further elaborates on this by examining the "downgrading" phenomenon wherein immigrants are employed in positions below their qualification level (2013). The overall slight increase in average wages due to immigration, as suggested by the study, could be attributed to immigrants earning less than their marginal productivity, possibly because of job mismatches or downgrading. This impact on the labour market highlights the need for careful policy considerations to harness the benefits of immigration while mitigating its adverse effects on vulnerable worker segments. Their analysis offers insight into the effects of immigration on wage distribution, illustrating that areas with a higher immigrant-to-native ratio often see wage decreases, whereas regions with lower concentrations tend to experience wage increases.

The relationship between socioeconomic factors and migration patterns is a fundamental topic within migration studies, emphasising the influence of educational opportunities and job prospects on migration choices. As examined in 2.2.5, the United Kingdom stands out as a prime destination for international students, particularly from Southeast Asia, which have contributed significantly to the movement of this population to the United Kingdom in the past few decades. Citizens from non-English speaking countries like Thailand and Vietnam have shown a keen interest in English language courses, while those from English-speaking nations, including Singapore, Brunei, and Malaysia, have sought higher education opportunities at British universities (Unterreiner, 2015). In addition, Unterreiner notes:

> Three-quarters of the migrants from Mainland China have arrived in England and Wales over the last decade, mainly due to student migration, which represents 45% of this group (Office for National Statistics 2013). In 2009/10, there were 60,705 international students from China in the UK, making China the principal country of origin for migrants, before India

(40,475). 45% of Chinese students studied business and management (compared with 37% of Indian students) (Williams 2012: 4). (2015: 12)

This attraction is not solely based on academic excellence but also on the opportunities for post-study employment and potential career advancement within this country, emphasising how educational incentives in target nations are key drivers in shaping global migration flows. Scholarly research has shown how the promise of educational advancement in countries like the United Kingdom acts as a strong motivator for migrants, significantly influencing the patterns of international migration. According to Unterreiner (2015) the nation's strategic position as a preferred destination for international students is emphasised by its ranking as the second most popular choice for full-degree programs among Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)[26] countries, trailing only the United States. Notably, the United Kingdom boasts a considerable proportion of international students, holding 15% of the global share, a figure surpassed only by Australia (Unterreiner, 2015: 17). These international students, primarily on Tier 4 visas, contribute to the country's educational and cultural landscape. To secure a Tier 4 visa, candidates must fulfil the requirements detailed in 4.4.2, a process that articulates the structured pathway the United Kingdom has established to attract and retain global academic talent. This structured approach not only facilitates the entry and stay of international students but also reflects the country's recognition of the value these students bring, both academically and economically.

Socioeconomic impact of British soft power in Malaysia: Migration, education, and diplomatic ties

Building upon the understanding of the British socioeconomic implications, the migration patterns, assimilation, and evolving community dynamics not only contribute to international migration but also form a unique backdrop for comprehending British international relations. Examining the broader spectrum of international relations reveals that British soft power emerges as a key influencer, particularly in shaping its relationship with Malaysia. This is particularly relevant when considering the concept of "soft power", as defined by Joseph Nye in *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics*. The effects of migration within the United Kingdom, shaping its society into a diverse and integrative fabric, mirror the principles of soft power in the realm of international dynamics, especially in the context of the

[26] Founded in 1961, the OECD is an intergovernmental organisation with 38 member countries created to stimulate economic progress and world trade. https://www.oecd.org.

country's relationship with countries like Malaysia. Soft power refers to a nation's capacity to shape preferences and influence behaviour through attraction and appeal, as opposed to coercion or force. British soft power, as highlighted by Nye, is rooted in its historical influence, robust democratic institutions, and a wealth of cultural exports. A significant element of this soft power is the global prevalence of the English language, which facilitates cultural and educational exchanges worldwide.

British soft power significantly influences its relationship with Malaysia, shaping interactions through various dimensions. The historical ties between the two nations, rooted in the colonial era, establish a foundational connection that influences current cultural, educational, and political relations. This shared history is a critical element of soft power. Additionally, the United Kingdom's strong democratic institutions and governance models offer a source of inspiration and a benchmark for Malaysia, particularly in legal frameworks and administrative systems. The historical and linguistic ties between Malaysia and the United Kingdom make the latter a preferred destination for English-speaking Malaysian students, as the reputation of British universities, coupled with the potential for acquiring internationally recognised qualifications, is a significant draw. This aspect has been explored in depth by Alves and King in *Student Mobilities* (Scholten in *Introduction to Migration Studies*, 2022) arguing that international education is increasingly viewed as a strategic asset, offering both cultural and economic capital. They note that it:

> Reflects the fact that the USA and the UK are the two leading 'importers' of international students, and China and India the main 'exporters'. Third, international students are exemplars of enduring postcolonial relations. Many of them move towards their former colonial metropoles, for cultural and linguistic reasons; whilst on the others side of the coin, the recruitment of the international students is an expression of postcolonial soft power exercised by former imperial centres such as the UK, France, Spain, and Portugal. (2022: 182)

The movement of international students is a phenomenon that encapsulates economic aspirations, educational goals, and the lingering effects of colonial histories. It signifies how educational institutions and policies are intertwined with global geopolitics and cultural exchanges, shaping the landscape of international relations and global mobility. In terms of employment opportunities, the country's diverse economic sectors provide an array of

prospects for Malaysian professionals, such as finance, engineering, IT, and healthcare and have been particularly attractive due to the demand for skilled labour and the presence of multinational companies. The professional experiences gained in various sectors not only benefit Malaysian migrants but also contribute significantly to the development of their home country upon their return. This suggests that the knowledge and skills acquired abroad can play a crucial role in fostering economic and social progress in Malaysia, enhancing the overall impact of migration on both host and home countries.

As highlighted in 2.2.5, the decision of Malaysian families to send members abroad for education and employment is tied to their socioeconomic status, with those higher up the economic ladder more able to afford the significant costs associated with international education and relocation. This financial capacity enables families to leverage educational opportunities in prestigious institutions abroad, which often come with a hefty price tag not just in terms of tuition fees but also living expenses, travel, and ancillary costs associated with settling in a new country. The ability to access international education is not merely a matter of academic advancement but also a strategic move that can enhance social standing and economic prospects. For many families, investing in education abroad is seen as a pathway to ensuring better employment opportunities for their members, which, in turn, can lead to improved economic conditions for the family as a whole. This cycle where wealth enables access to premium education, which then leads to better job prospects, further entrenches the socioeconomic advantages of well-off families.

Moreover, the choice of destination for education and employment is also influenced by the family's socioeconomic status. Families with more resources are more likely to choose countries with higher living costs but more prestigious educational institutions, such as the United Kingdom or the USA. In contrast, families with limited resources might opt for more affordable destinations with lower living and educational costs. The impact of international education on the socioeconomic mobility of Malaysian families extends beyond individual gains. When students return to Malaysia with international degrees and global work experience, they bring back not only enhanced skills and knowledge but also the potential to influence the local job market, introduce new perspectives, and contribute to the nation's development. This return of talent can lead to the creation of new businesses, the introduction of innovative practices, and the strengthening of Malaysia's human capital, thereby influencing the broader economic and social landscape of the country. In this context, the socioeconomic status of families in Malaysia is a key factor that shapes not only the opportunities available to

individuals but also the broader patterns of educational and employment-related migration. This dynamic contributes to the perpetuation of existing social inequalities, as those from wealthier backgrounds are more likely to access and benefit from international opportunities, thus reinforcing the link between socioeconomic status and global mobility.

This dynamic, wherein individuals from affluent backgrounds predominantly access international opportunities, serves to entrench existing social disparities, thus creating a bridge to understanding how the United Kingdom's cultural exports—encompassing literature, music, and media—garner popularity in Malaysia, not merely as forms of entertainment but as instruments of soft power that extend British cultural influence and nurture a favourable perception among the Malaysian populace. Another major aspect of this soft power dynamic is the widespread use of the English language, one of the main languages in Malaysia, which facilitates cultural, educational, and business exchanges. The British esteemed educational institutions attract Malaysian students, furthered by initiatives like the Chevening Scholarships, strengthening long-term professional and cultural ties. Furthermore, the country's reputation in finance, technology, and creative industries enhances its capacity for meaningful trade and investment partnerships. Collectively, these facets of British soft power shape the influence and engagement with countries like Malaysia, fostering a relationship that transcends traditional diplomatic and economic interactions and extends into the interconnected nature of the globalised world through migration.

The significant influence of immigration on the United Kingdom's labour market, particularly in vital sectors like healthcare, technology, and academia, introduces a myriad of diverse skills and perspectives that fuel economic dynamism. Despite concerns regarding its potential adverse effects on native employment and wages, research largely portrays immigration as having a neutral or slightly positive impact on the labour market. EU immigrants, often younger and better educated, tend to have higher employment rates compared to natives, and their presence has not resulted in significant wage or employment downturns for the UK-born workforce. Additionally, immigrants play a constructive role in the public finances, without substantial evidence of exacerbating income inequality or straining local services. The shifts observed in the labour market post-2008 are more closely tied to the global financial crisis than to immigration. With immigrants, particularly those of working age, bolstering the labour force and contributing to economic growth, the stage is set to explore how these changes intersect with British identity dynamics in the following section. This exploration will focus on the ways in which immigration patterns are interwoven with the shifting

landscape of British identity, examining cultural integration, societal perceptions, and the overarching effects on national identity within contemporary Britain.

2.3.5. British identity dynamics

Within the agglomeration of British identity, one can discern the profound impact of its historical journey and the myriad influences that have converged over time. This captivating mosaic is not only a reflection of the United Kingdom's storied past but also a testament to the interweaving of diverse threads within its societal fabric. British identity is a fusion of national pride, regional distinctiveness, and the rich contributions of immigrants who have made this land their home. Each element contributes its own unique shade to the overall portrait, creating a kaleidoscope of experiences and perspectives that enrich the cultural tableau. The historical foundations of the United Kingdom, from the medieval monarchy to the democratic evolution of modern times, serve as the backdrop against which its identity has evolved. The echoes of centuries past resonate in its castles and cathedrals, in the literature and art that define the nation's essence. These historical imprints have not only shaped the collective consciousness but also imbued the identity with a sense of continuity and resilience.

Regionally, the distinct characters of England, Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland further enrich the narrative. The rolling hills of the English countryside, the rugged landscapes of the Scottish Highlands, the poetic valleys of Wales, and the resilient spirit of Northern Ireland all contribute to regional identities. Each locale carries its own traditions, languages, and cultural nuances, forming a cohesive yet diverse patchwork that embodies the essence of unity in diversity. Crucially, British identity is continually invigorated by the vibrancy of its immigrant communities. From the Caribbean to South Asia, from Africa to Europe, individuals from diverse backgrounds have woven their narratives into the broader landscape. Their traditions, languages, and customs intertwine with native roots to create a blend that not only tolerates differences but celebrates them. In the contemporary landscape, this mosaic of identities is reflected in the cosmopolitan cities, where global influences converge and coalesce. The thriving cultural scene, culinary diversity, and the celebration of various festivals define the modern British identity.

The construction of British identity

The composite nature of the British national identity emerges as a convergence of the distinctive English, Welsh, and Scottish identities, each exemplified by historical and cultural attributes that collectively shape the overarching British identity. In *Britons: Forging the Nation 1707-1837*, Colley illustrates the basis for this identity:

> [In the] British nation between the Act of Union joining Scotland to England and Wales in 1707 and the formal beginning of the Victorian age in 1837. […] a sense of British national identity was forged, […] this particular sense of nationhood and belonging […] both in terms of its remarkable strengths and resilience, and in […] weaknesses. […] The invention of Britishness [was] central during this 130-year long period of a succession of wars between Britain and France. (1994: 1)

Colley's description of the "invention of Britishness" suggests that national identity is not simply a natural evolution but often a constructed phenomenon, shaped by external threats and internal narratives. Identifying with Britain, Colley defines patriotism as follows:

> Being a patriot is a way of claiming the right to participate in British political life, and ultimately a means of demanding a much broader access to citizenship. […] Looking critically and comprehensively at patriotism in this period is also vital if we are to understand the evolution of what must be called British nationalism. (1994: 5)

The association of patriotism with citizenship demands combines inclusionary and exclusionary tendencies of British nationalism, which warrants a critical examination concerning the eligibility criteria for this brand of patriotism and its interactions with variables like class, race, and gender. Bryant's two versions of "carry-on Britain" call to mind:

> The first version of British Britain is exclusive. It lauds self-sufficiency and covets Little Britain. That the economy is no longer in obvious relative decline gives heart to Little Britons who cherish the notion of national economic sovereignty and an economic future outside the EU. A Little Britain that keeps clear of foreign wars and occupations has its appeal, too. But Little Britain can also so easily be sour, unimaginative, and unresourceful a tight little island indeed, unappreciative of its own diversity, hostile to immigrants with different ways, slow to grasp new economic and cultural possibilities in which case many of its most talented citizens would surely leave it. (Sykes 2005). (2006: 286)

I focus on the first version here. Bryant criticises the notion "British Britain" as an insular ideology, emphasising self-reliance and detachment from the EU, appealing during economic

stability. This version of Britain, however, risks becoming narrow-minded, resistant to diversity, and hostile towards immigrants, potentially alienating its "most talented citizens". This shift reflects a blend of socioeconomic dissatisfaction and xenophobia, suggesting that while seeking a distinct national identity is valid, its narrow, exclusionary form could harm Britain's societal and adaptive capacities. Both scholarly works' examinations span the historical trajectory, scrutinising the emergence of English nationalism and probing into the issues of race and ethnicity from the earliest historical era to the contemporary one. They not only illuminate the historical modelling of these identities but also delve into their ongoing evolution in response to dynamic historical and sociopolitical landscapes. These analytical ventures introduce an additional layer to the cultural and social milieu of the United Kingdom, particularly within the realms of migration and societal integration into the broader British identity.

The analysis of the 2011 and 2021 UK Census data, retrieved from the ONS, Scotland Census and Northern Ireland Census, provides a comprehensive quantitative understanding of the country's demographic shifts, emphasising the changes in the ethnic composition of England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland. The 2021 Census data reveal that 81.7% (48.7 million) of residents in England and Wales identified as "White", a decline from 86.0% (48.2 million) in 2011. Notably, within this "White" category, those identifying as "English, Welsh, Scottish, Northern Irish or British" decreased to 74.4% (44.4 million) from 80.5% (45.1 million) in 2011. This trend suggests a diversifying ethnic landscape, further highlighted by the increase in the "White: Other White" category, which rose to 6.2% (3.7 million) in 2021 from 4.4% (2.5 million) in 2011, possibly facilitated by the new census's user-friendly online interface. In contrast, Scotland's population remains predominantly white at 96.0%, albeit with a slight decrease from 2001. Specifically, 91.8% identified as 'White: Scottish' or 'White: Other British'. The figures for White Irish stood at 1,837,575 (96.55%) and Irish Traveller at 2,609 (0.14%), reflecting a relatively homogeneous ethnic composition compared to England and Wales. Furthermore, households with members from multiple ethnic backgrounds increased to 10.1% (2.5 million) in England and Wales, up from 8.7% (2.0 million) in 2011, indicating a rise in ethnic intermingling. These figures not only chart the demographic evolution of the United Kingdom but also illustrate the shifting identity landscape, reflecting broader societal changes. The statistical data serve as a vital tool for policymakers and researchers, yielding knowledge on the changing fabric of British society and the varying demographic dynamics across its constituent nations. The decreasing dominance of the

English, Welsh, Scottish, Northern Irish, or British identity in England and Wales, alongside the stable predominance of white identity in Scotland, illustrates the diverse and evolving nature of ethnic identities in the nation, shaping its sociopolitical narrative. The demographic statistics are not just figures; they represent a deeper exploration into the sociopolitical fabric and power structures of the nation. The distribution of populations across the nation unveils relationships and identities that merit detailed scrutiny. Academic studies in this realm are crucial, providing a deep understanding of the interconnections among demographics, identity, and power, and how these elements collectively sculpt the British identity, nationalism, and Britishness. Such research does more than add to scholarly debate; it provides a deeper understanding of British sociocultural dynamics.

The quest to define British national identity is a continuous journey, shaped by the nation's efforts to adapt to evolving global and domestic contexts. Aligning with Bryant, Richard Eyre in *What is Britishness?* points out that "Being British is a variable ideology" (The Guardian, 2004), thus making "Britishness" a dynamic concept transformed by key historical events such as World War II's aftermath, the dissolution of the British Empire, and the impacts of immigration, globalisation, and the United Kingdom's EU relations. These factors have spurred a reassessment of British identity, challenged old views and prompted a reconstructive response. Under Tony Blair's leadership, the Labour Party aimed to recast Britishness, infusing it with democracy, creativity, and youthfulness, aligning the national identity with modern values yet retaining historical ties (Driver & Martell, 2002). The emergence of "New Britain" brought in a progressive, inclusive identity, embracing diversity and innovation, especially in cultural and creative realms (Driver & Martell, 2002: 143). Despite these efforts, Bhikhu Parekh points out in *The Future of Multi-Ethnic Britain: Report of the Commission on the Future of Multi-Ethnic Britain* that New Labour largely overlooked race and cultural diversity in its manifesto and key communications, including Blair's speeches prior to the election. The implicit belief was that policies designed to "benefit the whole of society would automatically benefit Asian, black and Irish communities at the same time" (2000: 251). This "colour- and culture-blind" approach, which overlooked the nuances of race and culture, predominated in their social policy until the end of 1999 (2000: 251). While Blair's government sought to distance itself from the exclusive version of Britishness propagated by previous Conservative administrations, aiming for a global, multicultural Britain, it struggled to strike a balance between celebrating diversity and cultivating a cohesive national identity. This approach, however, faced the challenge of balancing diversity with fostering a unified national ethos. The

integration of multiculturalism into this identity was contentious, stirring debates on integration and the balance between diversity and unity. Gordon Brown's tenure echoed this narrative, emphasising inclusivity and pluralism while addressing criticisms faced by Blair's policies, especially in light of events like the 7/7 bombings and rising Scottish independence calls (Alibhai-Brown, 2000).

The attempt to delineate British national identity in the 21st century is a reflection of a broader, global challenge to meld multiculturalism, globalisation, and national cohesion, signalling the necessity for a narrative that is both adaptive and inclusive, one that fosters a sense of belonging for every citizen. This contemporary pursuit starkly contrasts with Parekh's and Hirsch's interpretations of Britishness. Parekh questions how this concept impacts the ethnic minority community:

> Where does this leave Asians, African-Caribbeans and Africans? For them Britishness is a reminder of colonisation and empire, and to that extent is not attractive. But the first migrants came with British passports, signifying membership of a single imperial system. For the British-born generations, seeking to assert their claim to belong, the concept of Englishness often seems inappropriate, since to be English, as the term is in practice used, is to be white. Britishness is not ideal, but at least it appears acceptable, particularly when suitably qualified –Black British, Indian British, British Muslim, and so on. (2000: 38)

Parekh explores the identity struggle of ethnic minorities, noting the negative colonial connotations associated with Britishness. While Britishness is complex due to its colonial past, it offered a sense of inclusion for the first migrants with British passports. However, for British-born ethnic minorities, Englishness feels exclusionary, often equated with whiteness, as exemplified in "national-cultural images of "Englishness" in Thatcher's case and "Americanness" in Reagan's" (During, 2010: 11). Britishness, though imperfect, is more adaptable, allowing for hyphenated identities like Black British or Indian British, providing a way for these communities to assert their British identity while acknowledging their diverse backgrounds. In the same vein, Hirsch perceives it as inherently exclusive, suggesting it harbours "the threat of exclusion" (2018: 214). Hirsch probes the streams of identity within the United Kingdom's diverse fabric, questioning, "How does this unprecedented level of mixing, for the ethnic groups that are likely to form interracial relationships, affect their sense of

Britishness and identity?" She points out the varied experiences of different "'mixed race'" subgroups, such as those identified as "South Asian white, East Asian white, and Arab white" (2018: 154), illustrating the complexity of identity in a multicultural landscape. Her critique extends to the notion that Britishness, as currently framed, marginalises a significant portion of the population, asserting, "Britishness is an identity that is excluding a growing number of people who, like me, should be among its core constituents" (2018: 318). In addition, Lassalle pinpoints that despite the new hybrid White/Minorities categories (*les nouvelles catégories hybridées Blancs/Minorités*) being subject to individual discretion and self-declaration (*autodéclaration*) without administrative enforcement, minorities still find it difficult to evade the "black box" (*boîte noire*) category, which implies a level of restriction (2009: 122). This perspective challenges the evolving narrative of a modern, inclusive British identity, as championed by politicians like Blair and Brown, who strove to integrate diversity into the national ethos. The discourse thus oscillates between the aspiration for a unifying, forward-looking identity and the reality of an identity construct that some argue still perpetuates exclusion. This tension indicates the task of crafting a British identity that not only celebrates diversity but also ensures that all individuals, irrespective of their ethnic or racial backgrounds, feel integral to the national narrative.

The continuing discourse on Britishness reflects a balance between embracing diversity and fostering a shared identity, shaping the nation's political, social, and cultural realms. Britishness, as a political identity, underpins individual freedom and shared citizenship, acting as a unifying force beyond "organic cultural" elements (Revest, 2008). It is crucial for unity and democracy, transcending the 1707 Treaty of Union specifics and advocating for rights and equality within a broad, inclusive framework (Colley, 1994; Bryant, 2006; Revest, 2008). Devolution enhances democracy by promoting balanced governance, allowing regional diversities to enrich rather than divide the national identity. Thus, according to Didier Revest in *Britishness as political identity*, Britishness serves as a flexible political identity that supports both individuality and equality, contributing to the United Kingdom's resilience. He further mentions Raphael Samuel and Marcel Gauchet, who assert that Britishness fosters a pluralistic understanding of nationhood, ensuring cohesion amidst societal diversity, essential for the nation's continued unity and existence (Revest, 2008). Furthermore, the perception of Britishness among immigrants, especially those from ethnic minority groups, introduces an additional dimension to the discourse, raising questions about whether these individuals also embrace Britishness as a political identity or whether they experience it differently.

Influence of immigrants on British cultural and identity dynamics

In the 2021 Census, the United Kingdom's demographic composition included approximately 9.5 million individuals born outside the country, constituting 14.4% of its total population. This segment of the population predominantly falls within the age bracket of 26 to 64 years, showcasing a lower representation among children and the elderly. London stands out as the region with the highest concentration of immigrants, hosting 3,346,000 foreign-born residents, which accounts for 37% of the nation's total migrant population, emphasising the city's role as a melting pot where diverse cultures and identities converge. Notably and as pointed out in 2.3.3, individuals born in India emerged as the largest group among the migrant population, totalling 896,000, thereby surpassing Polish-born residents, who were previously the largest group. Despite a decrease in the number of Polish migrants, they remained the largest non-British nationality in the United Kingdom, with 696,000 individuals. The migration motives vary significantly between EU and non-EU migrants; approximately half of the non-EU migrants reported family reunification as their primary reason for their move, whereas EU migrants predominantly cited employment opportunities as their main incentive. With the United Kingdom harbouring a plethora of immigrant communities, each bring with them distinct national identities and cultural heritages and sculpts the contours of the nation's multicultural society. An essential barometer of immigrant integration lies in the formation of social connections and involvement in civic activities, a topic extensively examined in reports by the Migration Observatory.

Research indicates that migrants in the United Kingdom frequently reside in locales with predominantly non-migrant populations, reporting levels of neighbourhood social cohesion akin to their UK-born counterparts. A salient trend is the evolving nature of immigrant integration, a phenomenon also scrutinised by the Migration Observatory. Immigrants showcase escalating levels of civic participation, manifested through activities such as volunteering and club memberships. Significantly, this heightened engagement corresponds with the duration of immigrants' residency in the United Kingdom, suggesting a gradual assimilation into the broader societal fabric. Civic participation is recognised by scholars and policymakers as a crucial indicator of social integration, symbolising the active involvement and contributions of immigrants to the communities they reside in. Furthermore, the civic engagement of migrants, encompassing activities like volunteering and participation in local organisations, tends to increase with the length of their stay in the United Kingdom, illustrating

a positive correlation between their duration of residence and their level of community involvement.

In addition, about 41% of migrants in the United Kingdom have partners born in the same country and of the same ethnicity, compared to 90% of UK-born individuals. The sense of belonging among migrants evolves over time, with those having spent longer in the country often expressing a stronger connection to their current location. Furthermore, the Migration Observatory highlights an aspect of social dynamics, revealing that while approximately 28% of foreign-born adults in the United Kingdom tend to associate predominantly with friends from their own ethnicity, there exists, on the whole, a higher degree of ethnic diversity in friendships among migrants compared to their UK-born counterparts. The pattern observed in immigrant communities' civic participation and social integration emphasises their remarkable adaptability and interconnectedness, creating diverse social connections that go beyond ethnic lines. This scenario directs attention to unique social dynamics within migrant communities, hinting at the influence of cohort effects, generational shifts, and identity on their social interactions. Furthermore, the evolving sense of belonging among migrants enriches this narrative; as they spend more time in the country, they often develop a stronger attachment to their new environment, symbolising their journey towards integration and affiliation. This growing sense of belonging illustrates the gradual process by which immigrants establish profound ties with their host nation throughout their residency, revealing factors that shape their experiences and relationships in their adopted homeland.

Integration and belonging among immigrant communities significantly contribute to the evolution of British identity, marking it with a distinctive character of cultural integration that reflects the diverse influences and interactions within the United Kingdom, as identities become "more fractured and sophisticated" (Hirsch, 2018: 23). Notably, these communities have introduced diverse elements of global culture into the United Kingdom, encompassing elements such as music, literature, art, food, and fashion, particularly from regions that were historically under British influence. This cultural amalgamation, as articulated in Hall's work (1990), has significantly enriched the societal fabric of the United Kingdom. Hall's work explores cultural identity within the context of diaspora, providing a framework to comprehend the transformative impact of immigrant contributions on British cultural identity. Bryant's second version of "British Britain" can be examined here.

> The second version of British Britain is non-exclusive. It is not self-sufficient and requires augmentation by another more expansive Britain. Ourselves alone is too limiting, too undynamic. The outward-looking successor to Great Britain and the necessary complement to a non-exclusive British Britain is a Cosmopolitan Britain. […] Cosmopolitan England that it acknowledges not just the diversification of the people particularly that legacy of Empire, citizens (whose forebears are) of black or Asian origin but also the enrichment of its economy and culture from sources abroad whether carried by immigrants or transmitted by trade or the media. It looks out not just to the former Empire but crucially to Europe, America, and the world. […] Cosmopolitan Britain is like Cosmopolitan England only more so. It combines the old diversity of English, Scots, Welsh, and citizens of other origins (Irish, Jewish, etc.) with the new diversity of citizens from the Commonwealth (very often the new Commonwealth), post-war Europe (from Poland, Italy, etc.), and other parts of the world, and its economy benefits from the migrant labour of non-citizens. Cosmopolitan Britain can be hard to manage but the rewards of managing it well are great. (2006: 286-287)

Bryant's "Cosmopolitan Britain" presents a perspective on British identity, advocating for an inclusive understanding that embraces the nation's internal diversity and external connections. This approach contrasts with the first version: insular notions of identity, recognising the limitations of an "Ourselves alone" mindset and highlighting the importance of engaging with global cultures, economies, and communities. By incorporating the varied backgrounds of its citizens, including those from the Commonwealth, post-war Europe, and beyond, "Cosmopolitan Britain" acknowledges the enriching impact of migration on the nation's cultural and economic landscape. The challenges and rewards of managing such diversity emphasise that while it may be complex, the benefits of a well-integrated cosmopolitan society are substantial, enhancing Britain's cultural depth and international relations. Beyond cultural enrichment, immigrants contribute to the United Kingdom in a dual capacity, extending their influence not only through labour and skills but also by bringing values and perspectives. This dual contribution, elucidated in Vertovec's *Super-diversity and its Implications*, punctuates immigrant influence on the United Kingdom. His exploration of super-diversity evaluates factors shaping contemporary migration patterns and the resulting diverse social landscapes. In

the context of the United Kingdom, this super-diversity is reflected in the manifold contributions of immigrants, enhancing both the economic vitality and cultural vibrancy of the nation.

As a result, identities are continuously shaped and reshaped by a myriad of factors, including significant political events like the Brexit referendum in 2016, which had a profound impact on how national and regional identities are perceived and expressed within the United Kingdom. In the aftermath of Brexit, there has been an intensified focus on the distinct identities of Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland, each manifesting divergent political and cultural orientations, which are reflective of their unique historical and contemporary experiences. This differentiation in identity and perspective adds a layer to the understanding of British identity, intersecting with Vertovec's concept of super-diversity and societal changes in light of immigration and globalisation. The concept of super-diversity provides a lens through which migration patterns, political dynamics, regional distinctions and evolution of identities within the United Kingdom can be examined. This ongoing transformation is influenced by an array of factors, including demographic changes, sociopolitical events, and regional narratives, all contributing to the reshaping of the nation's sociocultural landscape. As the nation grapples with these shifts, the fluid nature of identities remains a focal point of academic research and public discourse, reflecting the broader discussions inherent in the super-diversity discourse. Through this lens, the continuous evolution of British identities is not only acknowledged but also scrutinised through interconnections between individual, communal, and national identities in the context of a changing global landscape.

2.3.6. Ethnic minority identity dynamics

The diverse population in the United Kingdom, including ethnic minorities from South Asia, the Caribbean, Africa, the Middle East, East and Southeast Asia, and Europe, reflects its historical and global connections. South Asians from India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Sri Lanka, the Caribbean Windrush generation from Jamaica and Trinidad and Tobago, African communities from Nigeria, Ghana, Kenya, and Somalia, Middle Eastern and Arab individuals from Iraq and Syria, East and Southeast Asians from China and Vietnam, and Europeans from countries like Poland, Romania, Italy, and Portugal, all contribute to the demographic mix. These groups continuously negotiate and express their identities, merging their cultural heritage with Britishness, showcasing a dynamic cultural evolution. Within this diverse identity landscape, individuals balance integrating into British society and retaining their cultural roots, facing varying degrees of seamless integration or challenges due to societal barriers or discrimination, which influence their identity expression and integration journey.

Jaspal and Cinnirella's study on British national identity in *The construction of British national identity among British South Asians*, particularly focusing on British South Asians (BSA) outlines the tension between "ethnic" and "civic" models of Britishness, where the former is rooted in heritage while the latter is based on shared legal and political rights (2012). This distinction is crucial in understanding the integration and sense of belonging among this group, as ethnic models can sometimes limit their inclusion, especially when national identity is spotlighted following certain societal events. The "cultural boundary" as described by Jaspal and Cinnirella indicates the conflicts between adopting British norms and maintaining ethnic identities, impacting psychological coherence, and is complemented by instrumental, historical, and multicultural boundaries influencing British South Asians' perceptions of Britishness (2012: 170). Expanding on this, the concepts of multiculturalism and cultural pluralism, explored in 3.2.2, serve as frameworks allowing ethnic minorities to celebrate and maintain their cultural practices. This multicultural ethos is evident in the expressions of diverse cultures in British cities, where festivals, cuisines, languages, and traditions from around the world coexist and enrich the national variegation. A notable phenomenon within these communities is the emergence of hybrid identities, particularly among the younger generations or those born in the United Kingdom. These individuals often craft identities that are neither entirely of their heritage culture nor wholly British but a blend of both, creating unique, hybrid cultural expressions.

For instance, British South Asians may merge traditional music from their heritage with contemporary British genres, forging new, eclectic forms of musical expression. Hussain in *The Indian Diaspora in Britain: Political Interventionism and Diaspora Activism* provides such examples:

> [C]lassical Indian music has had a lot of influence in Britain. Great musical artists like Ravi Shankar, the best sitar player in India, have made their mark on British culture. A Pakistani Qawal led by the lead singer Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan grew popular in Britain before his premature death. The Punjabi dance Bhangra and its music had become very popular in Britain. Also the younger generation of British-born musical stars have made recordings of songs integrating Western and Indian music. Some of these productions had a profound impact on artists in Britain: Sir Andrew Lloyd Webber produced a stage musical called *Bombay Dreams* (2002). (2005: 195)

The influence of classical Indian music and its contemporary derivatives in Britain foreground the process of cultural exchange and adaptation. It reflects the broader themes of multiculturalism and diversity in British society, illustrating how music can serve as a powerful medium for cross-cultural dialogue and mutual understanding. In the same vein, Hamidu-Yakubu in her 2021 doctoral thesis titled *Transnational political participation of the Ghanaian diaspora in London and Accra*, articulates how London's Anglo-Ghanaian Society organise various social activities every so often.

> Wherever the numbers warrant it, there are a range of social activities to remind the emigrant Ghanaians of home and raise funds for development projects. For example, London's Anglo-Ghanaian Society meets at least twice a year for social events and sometimes has speakers from the Ghanaian High Commission. Another example, the Ghana Union UK, organizes Independence Day celebrations and other activities, such as talks on investment and citizenship issues. And also entertainment events such as dance and fashion shows were organized in London with Ghanaian bands based in the UK, and Accra attracted 4,000 Ghanaians in 2006. (2021: 296-270)

This highlights that entertainment events, like dance and fashion shows featuring Ghanaian bands based in the United Kingdom, appeal to both diaspora members and the broader society.

The substantial attendance at these events indicates a strong community presence and an interest in cultural expression and celebration. These activities demonstrate the Ghanaian diaspora's commitment to maintaining a connection with their heritage while adapting to their lives in the host country. They illustrate that cultural preservation and community development showcase how diaspora communities can foster cross-cultural understanding, a sense of belonging and contribute to their home countries' development from afar. Community networks within ethnic groups are salient in preserving cultural practices and providing a sense of belonging. Such networks are crucial for individual and collective identity, offering spaces where cultural traditions are maintained and celebrated even as individuals and families integrate into broader British society.

Furthermore, gastronomy is another aspect of such preservation and cross-cultural understandings. Sales *et al*.'s research on the Chinese diaspora in London titled *London's Chinatown: diaspora, identity and belonging* (2011) frames this aspect:

> Chinatown was important to our participants in representing a Chinese face to the outside world. As the respondent from Westminster Council said: "You can mention Chinatown as a symbol when chatting with non-Chinese people. It represents something about China". Many people spoke of taking western friends and colleagues to Chinatown, a place where they could show off Chinese culture and Chinese food. Several participants talked of its role as a visible symbol of the community which was 'invisible' due to its relatively small size and dispersed settlement. (2011: 222)

Their research illustrates Chinatown's importance in London as a cultural "symbol" and community hub for the Chinese diaspora, providing a space to celebrate and showcase Chinese culture and cuisine to others by providing a "visible symbol" and a sense of belonging for the otherwise dispersed and relatively small Chinese community in the city. By the same token, the relatively small Malaysian community finds a sense of visibility and belonging in spaces where they can celebrate and share their culture like Malaysia Hall, akin to the role Chinatown plays for the Chinese diaspora in London. The Malaysian community's passion for food is a prominent aspect of their identity. Hussin in *Gastronomy, Tourism, and the Soft Power of Malaysia* extends this aspect of food as part of their cultural identity through the use of gastronomy as a form of soft power.

> Malaysia has efficiently used a soft power approach and maximally received benefits from it. Malaysia used its resources to promote tourism, culture, food heritage, and halal food and has used slogans to attract and influence the global audiences not only in the western part of the world but also the Muslim population around the globe. (2018: 8)

Malaysia's strategic promotion of its food heritage and halal cuisine serves as a powerful tool for cultural diplomacy and tourism, attracting global audiences and influencing perceptions of Malaysia worldwide. Both examples underline the significance of cultural and gastronomic heritage in shaping and expressing diaspora identities and the power of such cultural expressions in fostering connections, understanding, and soft power on an international scale.

Intergenerational differences add another layer to these identity dynamics. Older generations might adhere more closely to their traditional customs, while the younger ones, particularly those raised or born in the United Kingdom, tend to navigate a mixed or hybrid cultural identity, often blending and reshaping their cultural expressions in new and hybrid ways. Niaz and Nasir enlighten this point:

> Citizenship identities of British Pakistanis have varied with different generations, with first generation Pakistanis still displaying a deep connection to their home country, second generation Pakistanis also exhibiting a strong connection with Pakistan, while third generations primarily identifying themselves as British (Ember, Ember and Skoggard, 2005). All three generations, however primarily describe themselves as British Muslims signifying a greater association with religion as compared to culture. (2018: 14)

It is noted that identifying as British Muslims dominates national or cultural affiliation even after three generations of life in the host country. This pattern indicates that nationality, culture, and religion shape the identities of British Pakistanis, reflecting their strong religious roots that transcend generations and geographic relocation. Interestingly, the Malay Malaysian community exhibits a comparable pattern, prioritising their Islamic identity over other forms of identity (further analysed in 5.3.3). Hopkins and Fiaz's research in *The Algerian Muslim Community in England: Understanding Muslim Ethnic Communities* on intergenerational religious identity within Algerians in England reveals a generational divide within the community, with older members perceiving a clash in values and attitudes compared to the

younger generation. The elders value hard work and are deeply attached to their traditional beliefs and practices, which they feel are not adequately preserved by the younger generation. This perception is encapsulated by the reflections of a middle-aged man who notices a shift in his own attitudes from a desire for rapid achievement to a more patient outlook, contrasting this with what he sees as the youth's preference for an "easy life" (2009: 39). The concern among older Algerians extends to the fear that children born in Britain are adopting an "English mentality", distancing themselves from their Algerian heritage and traditions (2009: 39). This perceived loss of cultural and work ethic values in the younger generation highlights the challenges of cultural transmission and adaptation in a diaspora context. Fascinatingly, despite these concerns, the older generation observes that the youth are, in some ways, more religious, particularly in terms of mosque attendance. This suggests cultural, religious, and generational identities, where young people may be seeking their own ways of connecting with their heritage and faith, even as they navigate the influences of their broader British environment.

Religiosity levels within this community show considerable variation, reflecting a spectrum of religious engagement. One respondent in Hopkins and Fiaz's research encapsulates this diversity by noting that while all members identify as Muslim due to their upbringing and cultural background, their practices vary significantly—some adhere to daily prayers, while others simply acknowledge their Muslim identity without active practice. A Berber individual further illustrates this point by describing most Berbers as "cultural Muslims", who, despite their Muslim family backgrounds, may not engage actively in religious practices (Hopkins & Fiaz, 2009: 36). Another viewpoint emphasises the value of religion as a core aspect of personal dignity, values, and understanding of the world, akin to its role in Indian diaspora communities where, according to Sharma in *Immigrants in Britain: A Study of the Indian Diaspora*, "religion helps in providing a sense of group identity and a feeling of belonging" (2012: 33). This parallel illustrates a broader phenomenon where, for these communities, religion serves as a cornerstone of identity, often taking precedence over nationality or ethnicity, and showcasing the deep-rooted influence of religious beliefs in one way or another in shaping individual and collective identities across diverse diaspora communities.

In terms of cultural preservation, Sharma's analysis shares her viewpoint of the generational shifts within the Indian diaspora regarding cultural identity and assimilation. The first generation holds onto their homeland's culture, actively maintaining traditions and investing in the preservation of their cultural and religious heritage through Indian mass media like "watch[ing] Indian movies, listen[ing] to Hindi music and folk songs" (2012: 36). Their

connection to India remains strong, manifested in regular visits and ongoing family ties. However, a marked contrast is observed in the second and third generations, who exhibit "a great deal of cultural hybridisation" (2012: 36). These younger generations, "better integrated, speak better English, and identif[y] more with the mainstream culture than the first generation", show a diluted engagement with Indian culture, reflected in their sporadic interest in Indian traditions, declining "[p]roficiency in, and the knowledge and use of, Indian languages", and less frequent "visits on important occasions only or for tourism purposes" to India (2012: 36). This shift not only represents a natural progression of assimilation but also the impact of globalisation, which intensifies cultural exchanges and influences identity formation. The "anxiety" and "tension" experienced by the older generation stem from their concern over the dilution of cultural and spiritual links, fearing a loss of "interest in and bonding with Indian culture" (2012: 36). This intergenerational "conflict" spotlights the challenges diaspora communities face in balancing the preservation of cultural identity with the inevitable influences of their new environments. The younger generation's navigation between their inherited culture and the mainstream culture of their host country epitomises identity formation in a globalised context, where cultural boundaries are increasingly fluid. The younger generation's experience, as Sharma outlines, of oscillating between inherited and mainstream cultures, parallels with Maurice O'Connor's discussion on the evolving notion of Britishness in *The Indian Diaspora in the UK: Accommodating "Britishness"*.

> [A] new kind of Britishness inscribed within the sign of hybridity, no longer understood in exclusively racial terms. The conception of nationhood within the UK is also being reconceptionalized within this frame. British society, nonetheless, is still divided between those who accept that multiculturalism and hybridity are a reality, and those who uphold an exclusive sense of national belonging. It is within this disjunctive that British Indians must negotiate their identities. (2016: 148)

This "new" Britishness, characterised by hybridity, moves beyond racial definitions to embrace a more inclusive understanding of nationhood, suggesting the broader global trend of fluid cultural boundaries. Just as the younger Indian diaspora navigates between multiple cultural identities, the United Kingdom as a whole grapples with redefining national identity in an era of multiculturalism and hybridity, as explored in 2.3.5. However, this transition is not without its challenges. The division in British society between those who embrace multiculturalism and those who cling to a more exclusive national identity (Bryant's first version of British Britain)

mirrors the intergenerational tensions within the Indian diaspora and extending to the other diasporas. Both scenarios mark the continuous negotiation of identities in a world where cultural intersections are increasingly common but also contested. British Asians, particularly the younger generation, find themselves at the crossroads of this dynamic, negotiating their place within a Britain that is oscillating between inclusionary and exclusionary notions of national identity, aligning with Hirsch who states that "a younger generation is comfortable with the language of 'mixed race', embracing it as an increasingly common identity that for them has social meaning" (2018: 163).

What is more, the sense of belonging in a host country differs from one generation to the next, as O'Connor analyses:

> The fundamental difference, therefore, between first and second generation Asian diasporic groups is that most first-generation émigrés continue to feel as if they are living between the East and the West. On the contrary, second-generation Asians have limited primary links with the homeland, which are mostly formed through short visits there with their parents. So while there does exist a strong affiliation with this "other" nation, it is a "homeland" constructed through passed-on memories and romanticised imagery. (2016: 147)

This generational shift reflects a transition from a direct, lived experience of the homeland to an indirect, imagined relationship with it, influencing how each generation perceives their sense of belonging in the host country. While the first generation may grapple with a sense of split identity, the second generation navigates a more complex, perhaps less anchored, cultural identity, balancing between their British environment and the inherited cultural legacy of a homeland they know largely through second-hand experiences. This analysis reverberates with those of Sharma (2012), Niaz and Nasir (2018), as well as Hopkins and Fiaz (2009).

The examination of immigrant identity formation has thus far revealed multiple facets of identity, encompassing national, ethnic, and religious, among others. Research predominantly centres on ethnic and national identities, often underpinning the hypothesis that a persistent identification with an origin country might impede the formation of an identity associated with the destination country. However, empirical studies that I have examined here challenge this notion, demonstrating that immigrants can concurrently maintain identities linked to both their countries of origin and destination. Longitudinal perspectives on immigrant integration suggest

that over time, migrants tend to develop a "shared identity and sense of belonging" with their new surroundings (Fajth & Fernandez-Reino, 2020). This identity evolution is predominantly localised, with a sense of belonging to the immediate living environment serving as a critical indicator of inclusion and adaptation to a new locale. This is exemplified in the Malaysian immigrants who adeptly balance cultural adaptation and heritage preservation, supported by strong community networks that facilitate their integration. Despite challenges like post-Brexit policies and potential discrimination, they contribute significantly to British diversity and succeed in various sectors, showcasing the resilience and influence of the Malaysian diaspora. Empirical data provided in Lessard-Phillips *et al.* further elucidate this phenomenon, indicating that immigrants' identification with their place of origin remains robust, particularly among newer arrivals. For instance, 89% of migrants residing in the United Kingdom for up to five years report a strong connection to their place of upbringing (Fajth & Fernandez-Reino, 2020). This proportion declines to 46% among those who have lived there for over 15 years, suggesting a gradual detachment from their origin country (Fajth & Fernandez-Reino, 2020). Nonetheless, the degree of identification with the current place of residence does not exhibit a significant correlation with the duration of stay in the host country, implying that the assimilation of a new local identity may follow a distinct trajectory independent of the length of residence (Fajth & Fernandez-Reino, 2020). Thus, this analysis implies that immigrant identity formation undergoes a process oscillating between various factors, including time, local engagement, and origin and destination affiliations.

The celebration of multiculturalism and cultural pluralism in the United Kingdom creates a fertile ground for the flourishing of diverse cultural practices, nurturing vibrant, hybrid cultural expressions throughout the nation. This context sets the stage for an in-depth exploration of the complex journey immigrants embark upon within the host society. The journey of integration and identity formation for immigrants in the United Kingdom unfolds against a backdrop of societal challenges and the pursuit of cultural coherence.

2.3.7. Navigating the hurdles: Immigrant challenges

The myriad challenges confronted by immigrants in the United Kingdom profoundly influence their assimilation and societal participation. This confluence of barriers—linguistic, employment-related, educational, social, legal, housing, and healthcare-related—forms a complex matrix that shapes the immigrant experience in the United Kingdom.

At the forefront of these challenges is the issue of language proficiency. The ability to communicate effectively in English, the *lingua franca* amidst non-English speakers, is vital for both children and adults in the immigrant community. For children, the lack of English proficiency is not merely a linguistic hurdle but a multidimensional barrier that affects their educational trajectory and social integration. In educational settings, language proficiency is inextricably linked to academic success. The difficulty in understanding and engaging with the curriculum due to language constraints can lead to significant educational setbacks. This phenomenon is extensively discussed in academic literature, including Richard Race in *Multiculturalism and Education* (2015) which examines multiculturalism and language acquisition within educational settings.

> The compatibility of multiculturalism and education is based upon what is taught and who are or are not accommodated means that children can possibly be excluded and segregated (Ball, 2003; Archer and Francis, 2007; Banks, 2009). (2015: 96)

Race suggests that "[m]ulticultural education practice" should "be more effective" by reassessing methods "as to how and who was teaching what in the classroom" (2015: 96). His assertion resonates deeply with the broader context of the immigrant experience in the educational sector. This system represents a crucial gateway for these children, providing opportunities for academic and societal integration but also presenting significant obstacles. The challenges immigrant students encounter, such as cultural variances, language barriers, and adapting to unfamiliar educational methodologies, are not just temporary difficulties but have long-lasting effects on their academic and personal development. These educational hurdles are connected to broader aspects of social integration, impacting the students' identity formation and psychological adjustment. The role of language proficiency is particularly pronounced, extending its influence from the classroom to social interactions, which play a crucial part in forming friendships and integrating into the community. Thus, language is not

only a tool for academic success but also a key factor in the psychological well-being and social assimilation of immigrant children.

Cultural differences further complicate the educational experiences of these children. These differences may affect various aspects of schooling, from classroom interactions to pedagogical expectations, potentially causing feelings of alienation and impacting learning outcomes. For immigrant children, the effort to reconcile these cultural distinctions while assimilating into a new educational framework can be overwhelming and may influence their academic engagement and success. Moreover, the linguistic challenges faced by children who are not proficient in English can hinder their understanding and participation in the classroom, affecting their ability to excel academically and socially. These language-related obstacles extend to their capacity to build social relationships and develop a sense of belonging within their school community. Adjusting to the educational practices can be another source of difficulty for immigrant children accustomed to different educational systems. This adjustment involves acclimating to new teaching styles, classroom environments, and evaluation methods, which can be bewildering and may hinder their educational journey and adaptation to a new cultural setting. These factors—language, culture, and educational methodologies—shape the immigrant child's experience, emphasising the need for an educational system that is responsive and adaptable to the diverse backgrounds of its students (Race, 2015).

Recognising the significant impact of language, culture, and educational methodologies on the experiences of immigrant children, as highlighted by Race (2015), it becomes evident that similar factors play a critical role in the lives of adult immigrants, particularly in how English proficiency—or the lack thereof—has substantial implications for economic participation. The British job market predominantly requires proficiency in English, making it a prerequisite for most employment opportunities. Parekh notes that while older immigrants might not have "developed substantial language skills in English", "families are engaged in every type of economic activity" in "major urban areas, the corner shop, the newsagent's and the garment trade", are prime examples of "successful Asian small businesses" (2000: 31). This language barrier can pigeonhole adult immigrants into lower-skilled, often unstable jobs and into "small businesses", significantly affecting their economic prospects, stability and growth in bigger businesses. This is in line with Mariña Fernandez-Reino in her briefing on *English language use and proficiency of migrants in the UK*: "the foreign-born migrating after age 30, among whom 15% report job- and/or education-related problems [are] due to their low English

skills" (2019: 7). Furthermore, Fernandez-Reino stipulates that learning a language at a certain age complicates the learning process.

> Non-native English speakers learn the language at different paces depending on multiple factors, such as their learning abilities, the age at which they migrated or their exposure to English before and after moving to the UK. (2019: 4)

The rate at which non-English speakers in the United Kingdom learn the language is influenced by several factors identified by Reino, who notes that younger migrants and those with prior English knowledge or immersive post-migration environments tend to learn faster. Furthermore, the inability to learn and communicate effectively in English transcends the employment sphere, impacting access to vital services. This limitation manifests in difficulties in navigating the healthcare system, engaging with housing authorities, and understanding legal rights and obligations. What is more, "since 2005, naturalization has become conditional upon language skills and certain knowledge of British "core values", according to Unterreiner (2015: 17). Consequently, this linguistic challenge not only constrains economic mobility but also reinforces social and economic marginalisation, isolating immigrants from mainstream services and opportunities.

The employment landscape for immigrants is characterised by a set of challenges as well as by the ongoing public discourse and debate surrounding the impact of immigrants on the British job market and welfare system. The nature of this debate is highly polarised, encapsulating a wide array of opinions, biases, and socioeconomic considerations, which in turn significantly influence public perception and policymaking in the realm of immigration and labour. On one end of the spectrum, there is a contingent that views immigrants as a burden on the country's social welfare system. This perspective is often fuelled by concerns over resource allocation, job competition, job competition, and the financial sustainability of welfare programs. Critics in this cohort argue that immigrants, particularly those with lower skill levels or those seeking asylum, disproportionately utilise public resources without commensurate contributions to the economy. This argument is frequently entwined with broader sociopolitical narratives concerning national identity and economic protectionism. Conversely, there is a substantial argument spotlighting the beneficial impact of immigrants on the British economy. Proponents of this view highlight the diverse skills and labour that immigrants bring, often filling critical gaps in the job market. This includes not only high-skilled professionals in

sectors like healthcare and technology but also essential roles in industries facing labour shortages, such as agriculture and hospitality (Byrne *et al*., 2020; ONS, 2021). According to the 2021 ONS report, almost half of the specialist medical practitioners, including oncologists and cardiologists, are foreign-born, accounting for 47.5% of professionals in this field. In the wholesale trade industry, immigrants constitute 24.3% of the workforce. Furthermore, the food manufacturing sector has a significant number of foreign-born employees, with 40.4% of its workforce hailing from outside Britain, showcasing the diverse contributions of immigrants across various key industries. This perspective emphasises the resilience and entrepreneurial spirit of many immigrants who seek to improve their living conditions and contribute positively to their host country, thus enriching the economic fabric of the United Kingdom.

Bridging these findings serves as a vital link to understanding the broader challenges and forces of social integration in the immigration context. Social integration is a critical issue in the realm of immigration. In the United Kingdom, as elsewhere, immigrants must navigate adapting to new cultural standards and values, a task complicated by systemic barriers and possible discrimination. Their integration journey involves not only adaptation to a new setting but also the preservation and negotiation of personal cultural identities. This dual process can lead to significant stress and isolation for many immigrants. Ager and Strang's *Understanding Integration: A Conceptual Framework* identifies ten core domains essential for successful integration:

> [A]chievement and access across the sectors of employment, housing, education and health; assumptions and practice regarding citizenship and rights; processes of social connection within and between groups in the community; and barriers to such connection, particularly stemming from lack of linguistic and cultural competences and from fear and instability. (2008: 184-5)

The interrelatedness of integration aspects and challenging common misconceptions about ethnic identity and societal integration advocates for a nuanced view of social capital in the integration process. The understanding of social capital in the integration process aligns with findings from Lessard-Phillips *et al.* in *Migrants' social relationships, identity and civic participation in the UK* (2020). Their briefing shows that most immigrants in the United Kingdom live in predominantly non-migrant areas, suggesting significant assimilation and coexistence and debunking myths about migrant integration. Nonetheless, they report that

"[s]outh Asian and African migrants are more likely to experience social isolation compared to the UK born" (2020: 1). This evidence of social cohesion between immigrant and native populations contrasts with the harsh reality that systemic obstacles such as discrimination and inequality still profoundly affect immigrants' access to essential resources like jobs, education, and housing, exacerbating feelings of marginalisation and alienation. Thus, integration experiences are shaped by the strength of social connections immigrants can forge in their new home, which are crucial for navigating the new environment and learning essential social and cultural information. Yet, language barriers, cultural differences, and societal attitudes can impede these connections, adding hurdles to the integration path. Ager and Strang also stress the need to appreciate the diversity among immigrants, with various factors affecting each individual's integration journey. Legal and administrative hurdles, particularly for asylum seekers or refugees, add complexity to the immigrant experience in the UK, as explored by Phillimore *et al*. in *Economic self-reliance or social relations? What works in refugee integration? Learning from resettlement programmes in Japan and the UK* (2021). These challenges, intertwined with broader political and social debates, create a landscape of uncertainty and stress for immigrants. Furthermore, housing and healthcare access are pivotal issues, as outlined in Phillimore *et al.*'s work on housing and health in refugee and asylum-seeking populations. Immigrants, especially those with precarious financial or legal status, face significant obstacles in securing housing and healthcare, impacting their well-being and integration. Addressing these requires comprehensive policies that acknowledge the realities of immigration, ensuring that immigrants can live with dignity and contribute to their new communities.

The discourse on the Malaysian diaspora in the United Kingdom offers a unique lens through which to examine the broader narrative of immigration, national identity and the integration of immigrant communities. This discourse becomes particularly salient when considering the concept of "Britishness", a notion that has garnered increased attention in the aftermath of the 7th July 2005 bombings.[27] These events triggered a period of national reflection on themes of alienation, belonging, and the fusion of various cultural identities within the

[27] The 7th July 2005 London bombings, commonly known as 7/7, were a series of coordinated suicide attacks carried out by Islamist terrorists targeting London's public transport during the morning rush hour. On July 7, 2005, four suicide bombers struck London's transport network, resulting in 52 fatalities and over 770 injuries. The attacks involved explosions on three London Underground trains and one bus. These synchronised bombings marked a tragic and significant event, representing the deadliest bombings in London since World War II and the first suicide attacks in modern Western Europe. (Modood. 2005. *Remaking multiculturalism after 7/7*.)

United Kingdom. The exploration of Cantle in *Race and Community Cohesion* (2007) provides a critical lens through which to understand the challenges of cultural identity and integration faced by immigrant communities. This diaspora, like many immigrant communities, navigates the process of integrating into British society while endeavouring to maintain its unique cultural heritage. This process involves negotiating the space between their Malaysian ethnocultural identity and the broader British societal norms, a negotiation that is often laden with challenges of cultural dissonance and identity reconciliation. The notion of Britishness itself is heterogeneous, encompassing a spectrum of historical, social, and political elements that define national identity. For Malaysian immigrants, assimilating into this construct of Britishness while preserving their cultural distinctiveness can be a complex phenomenon.

The identity, discrimination and integration experienced by Muslim communities in the context of post-9/11 and 7/7 Britain are important in understanding cultural, social, and political factors that shape the lived experiences of these communities, influencing their sense of belonging, their societal participation, and the broader discourse on multiculturalism and national identity. Romain Garbaye and Vincent Latour hypothesise in *Community and Citizenship in the Age of Security: British Policy Discourse on Diversity and Counterterrorism since 9/11* that immigrant integration policy in Britain has been significantly shaped by security concerns. This shift has led to increased "forms of ethnicisation" and potentially fostered "segregation or […] self-segregation" (2016: 11). Hussain, Y. (2005) highlights the generational differences within the British-Pakistani community, where the "first generation Pakistanis consider themselves denizens, living but not belonging in Britain while second generation British Pakistanis limit their protests to a need for tolerance" amidst growing Islamophobia and Eurocentrism[28] (in Niaz and Nasir, 2018: 14). This sentiment of alienation and the quest for acceptance is further exacerbated by the broader context of discrimination against Muslims signifying the impact of Islamophobia and cultural racism on employment opportunities for Pakistani Muslims in Britain, underscoring "an age of 'multiple racism', where discrimination is experienced differently across segments of the population" (2020: 299). Moreover, Niaz and Nasir emphasise the pervasiveness of these biases, particularly post-

[28] "Hate speech and hate crimes against Muslims, known as Islamophobia, form another example of a new racism in Europe. [...] Portraying Muslims as an enemy, the 'other', means that 'Islamophobia upholds Eurocentrism, the dominant contemporary racialised system in Europe, where Western-identified subjects are awarded a better social, economic and political "racial contract" and seek to defend these privileges against real and imagined Muslim demands' (Jackson 2018: 2). In this way, we can see that Islamophobia is used as an 'instrument of power' by the majority population (Hafez 2016: 26-7). Jackson argues that Islamophobia may therefore have a form of self-interest at its centre rather than simply ignorant hostility." (Dillon, 2020: 299)

9/11, affecting "considerabl[y] […] job prospects" of not only the Pakistani Muslim community but also Muslims at large (2018: 16). Sharma extends this discussion by comparing the experiences of Indian Muslims with other Indian communities in the West, illustrating a distinct pattern of marginalisation and discrimination faced by Muslims, which is often exacerbated by clashes between the "Western lifestyle and values and that of the Muslim community", as "they, too, have become targets of racist attacks and discrimination" (2012: 37). This phenomenon resonates with Lassalle's line of thought: "les « bons » musulmans qui acceptent les « valeurs occidentales/britanniques » sont alors opposés aux « mauvais » musulmans qui les refusent" (2009: 123). These factors demonstrate a challenge faced by Muslim communities in the United Kingdom, marked by generational differences in response to discrimination, the overarching issue of Islamophobia, and the differences in the experiences of various South Asian Muslim communities, all contributing to their identity and integration processes in a post-9/11 and 7/7 world.

In the wake of these bombings, the United Kingdom witnessed heightened scrutiny of its immigrant communities, intertwining concerns of national security with the cultural integration of ethnic minorities. This period of intensified observation also brought the residential patterns of these groups to the forefront, especially after these terrorist attacks and disturbances in northern English towns, igniting debates around moral panic. These discussions frequently associate ethnic minority residential areas with social issues such as crime and radicalisation, promoting a narrative that unfairly stigmatises these neighbourhoods while overlooking the benefits of residential clustering. Such scrutiny has raised critical questions about the role of immigrant communities within the British social fabric. The misconceptions about residential clustering among ethnic minorities emphasise the need for community support, cultural preservation, and discrimination protection, noting that such clustering is often driven by economic and societal factors rather than isolationist tendencies (Shankley *et al*., in Byrne *et al*., 2020). The index of dissimilarity was introduced as a way to gauge residential segregation but has been critiqued for potential misinterpretation and its ability to truly represent community interaction. Notably, Catney's 2015 study shows a decline in residential segregation from 2001 to 2011, suggesting a move towards more integrated neighbourhoods, influenced by demographic shifts and the spreading out of communities, which mirrors the varied migration backgrounds and settlement trends of these groups (Shankley *et al*., in Byrne *et al*., 2020). Simultaneously, the social integration of immigrants reveals that while about 28% of foreign-born adults predominantly socialise with people of their own ethnicity, there is a notable

inclination towards ethnic diversity in their friendships more so than among the UK-born populace, indicating that migration fosters multicultural networks and signifies a growing engagement with the broader society (Fajth & Fernandez-Reino, 2020). Furthermore, intimate relationships exhibit a blend of cultural mixing and segregation: approximately 41% of immigrants have partners from the same country and ethnicity, compared to 90% of UK-born individuals (Fajth & Fernandez-Reino, 2020). For the Malaysian diaspora, like the other immigrant groups, this has meant confronting issues of alienation and the sense of belonging. The perception of being 'othered' within the broader societal context can lead to feelings of marginalisation, impacting community cohesion and the overall integration process. This balance is crucial for the formation of a cohesive, inclusive community, where diversity is not only acknowledged but also celebrated as part of the national social fabric (Cantle, 2007; Ager and Strang 2008).

While the United Kingdom presents cultural diversity, challenges related to integration, prejudice, and identity continue to persist. David in *Social capital and Common Ground for fostering ethnic relations* states:

> [I]n a multiethnic and multilingual society, social capital is necessary to help foster unity and harmony among various ethnic groups. However, such socialisation and sharing of knowledge can be obstructed in multiethnic societies by social barriers in the form of negative preconceptions towards other ethnic groups. Stereotyping is the result of distancing due to prejudice which is usually the result of ignorance of the values and culture of other groups. (in David *et al*., 2010: 36)

David emphasises the need for social capital while acknowledging the barriers posed by negative preconceptions and stereotyping, ultimately attributing these challenges to a lack of knowledge and understanding among diverse ethnic groups. Furthermore, David asserts that "[i]gnorance of others is often the basis for prejudice while understanding often results in trust and friendship, [creating] an absence of social capital" (in David *et al*., 2010: 36). Striking a balance between preserving cultural heritage and fostering a sense of unity within a diverse society remains an ongoing endeavour.

The myriad challenges confronted by immigrants in the United Kingdom, encompassing linguistic, employment, educational, social, legal, housing, and healthcare obstacles, significantly shape their integration and societal participation. Language proficiency,

especially in English, emerges as a crucial factor influencing the educational success and social integration of immigrant children, as highlighted by Race's exploration of multicultural education. This linguistic barrier extends to adult immigrants, affecting their employment opportunities and access to essential services, as noted by Fernandez-Reino. Moreover, the employment debate reflects polarised views on the economic contributions of immigrants, contrasting perceived burdens with their vital roles in various sectors. Social integration, a complex process involving cultural adaptation and community connection, is essential for the well-being and inclusion of immigrants. Efforts to balance cultural heritage preservation with societal unity are crucial for reshaping the identity dynamics of ethnic minorities, aiming for a society where diverse identities are celebrated, enriching British identity and promoting a future where diversity is a defining strength of the nation.

2.3.8. Chapter summary

Chapter 2.3 offered a comprehensive analysis of the United Kingdom's immigration narrative, starting from the post-World War II era. The chapter articulated how the nation transitioned from an imperial power to a multiethnic society, emphasising the pivotal role of immigration waves from former colonies, primarily driven by post-war labour demands and historical colonial connections. The chapter covered the evolution of immigration policies and their trajectory from the relatively open stance of the British Nationality Act of 1948, which invited Commonwealth citizens to assist in post-war rebuilding, to progressively more stringent immigration controls. These shifts reflect changing public attitudes and political landscapes, culminating in the transformative Brexit referendum. The introduction of a points-based immigration system post-Brexit marks a significant departure, aiming to regulate immigration more meticulously by prioritising skills and economic needs over EU citizenship.

The socioeconomic implications of immigration formed a core part of the discussion, with a particular focus on EU immigrants. The discussion countered prevalent misconceptions, showcasing that EU immigrants, who are generally younger and better educated compared to the native population, contribute positively to the United Kingdom economy. The analysis refuted the claim that immigration adversely affects the job prospects and wages of native workers, presenting a view of immigration's economic benefits. Further, the chapter explored the sophisticated British identity, shaped by historical, regional, and immigrant influences. This exploration examined the ongoing debates surrounding Britishness, which oscillate between inclusivity and exclusivity, exhibiting the nation's struggle to define its identity in a rapidly changing world. The identity dynamics of ethnic minorities received detailed attention regarding how these communities navigate the complexities of their cultural identities within the United Kingdom's multicultural landscape. This section highlighted the contributions of diverse ethnic groups to the nation's cultural evolution and their participation in the broader discourse on Britishness and multiculturalism.

Lastly, the chapter confronted the myriad challenges faced by immigrants, ranging from language barriers and employment difficulties to issues of social integration and access to essential services. It emphasised the critical role of social capital and community efforts to promote unity and cohesion in a society characterised by its diversity. The examination signified the necessity of fostering an inclusive environment that values and integrates the

multifaceted identities and experiences of its immigrant populations, ensuring their effective participation in the socioeconomic and cultural life of the United Kingdom.

Through its detailed examination, Chapter 2.3 not only offered insights into the historical and current state of United Kingdom immigration but also invited a reflection on the ongoing discourse surrounding identity, integration, and the role of immigrants in shaping the future of the United Kingdom.

2.4. Summary of literature review

The literature review conducted thus far has not only illuminated but also substantiated the core objective of this research: to delve into the experiences of the Malaysian diaspora in the United Kingdom, particularly focusing on how they navigate their identity construction and sense of belonging. This inquiry is vital, especially given the notable scarcity of research in this domain. Through this research, I aim to bridge this gap in the scientific literature, providing a comprehensive analysis that enriches our understanding of the Malaysian diaspora's experiences in the United Kingdom. Part 2 initiated the discussion with an overview of Malaysia's historical context, focusing on its colonial past and current sociocultural dynamics. British colonisation, lasting from the early 19th century until 1957, significantly influenced Malaysia's political, social, and economic fabric. The establishment of the Straits Settlements and control over the Malay Peninsula and Singapore shaped a hierarchical relationship between Britain and Malaysia, impacting the country's agriculture, economy, and the status of the Malay elite. The colonial legacy continues to affect Malaysia's migration trends and ethnic diversity. With a complex ethnic makeup, Malaysia faces challenges in balancing cultural preservation and addressing disparities shaped by centuries of colonisation and racial subjugation. The historical context is crucial for understanding Malaysia's current migration patterns, sociocultural diversity, and geopolitical interests. A detailed geographical overview of Malaysia was presented, with its division into Peninsular Malaysia and East Malaysia, bordered by various Southeast Asian countries and seas. The country's climatic conditions, monsoon seasons, and natural landscapes were described, which highlight their impact on biodiversity, agriculture, and migration. The map aided in understanding Malaysia's geographical and sociopolitical relations with neighbouring countries. The map aided in understanding Malaysia's geographical and sociopolitical relations with neighbouring countries. The historical migration influenced by British colonial labour policies significantly altered Malaysia's demographic and ethnic landscape. This overview spotlighted the role of geography in shaping Malaysia's infrastructure, environmental studies, and sociocultural exchanges.

The overview explored the implications of this diversity on language, religion, national identity, and the challenges and negotiations inherent in maintaining a multicultural identity. Furthermore, the economic section outlined Malaysia's transformation from a primary commodity-based economy to a diversified one, featuring the roles of natural resources, strategic location, and historical trade networks. The impact of British colonisation on economic structures and the country's evolution into a significant player in manufacturing and

Islamic finance was discussed. An analysis of Malaysia's education system uncovered the complexities of accommodating ethnic diversity while fostering national unity. The dual education system, language policies, and the balance between ethnic identity and socioeconomic development were examined. The federal constitutional monarchy and the political evolution post-independence were outlined, highlighting the influence of historical leaders and policies on the country's governance. The legal classification of citizens by ethnicity and religion, along with the challenges of crafting a cohesive national narrative, were discussed in the overview.

The chapter then moved on to explore in detail the profound influence of British colonialism on Malaysia's societal, economic, and political spheres. The introduction of Chinese and Indian labour significantly shifted the demographic and ethnic balance, with long-term effects on Malaysia's social fabric. The colonial 'divide and rule' strategy and its impact on Malaysia's ethnic divisions and governance were explored, alongside the broader implications of colonialism for global ethnicity and race perceptions. The education sector exhibits significant disparities, particularly affecting the non-*Bumiputera* minority groups. These disparities, deeply rooted in historical and policy-driven contexts, present substantial challenges in ensuring equitable educational opportunities for all Malaysians, potentially exacerbating ethnic tensions and impeding national progress. Affirmative action policies in Malaysia, initiated with the New Economic Policy (NEP) and extended through subsequent plans like the Tenth Malaysia Plan and the National Economic Action Council (NEAC), have aimed to rectify socioeconomic imbalances. However, these policies have also led to educational disparities, particularly affecting non-*Bumiputera* students.

This part scrutinised the introduction of a meritocracy system in 2002 aimed at addressing some of these disparities but faced challenges in fully realising a fair distribution of educational opportunities. This system, while promoting fairness in theory, often neglects the varied backgrounds of students, thus perpetuating existing societal inequities. The overrepresentation of *Bumiputeras* in the public sector, coupled with preferential treatment in education, has broader socioeconomic implications, affecting employment opportunities and perpetuating interethnic economic disparities. Consequently, educational disparities influence the aspirations and experiences of Malaysian youth, shaping their strategies and sentiments as they navigate opportunity structures. The increasing trend of pursuing education overseas reflects broader changes in global mobility and employment market preferences among Malaysian students. The phenomenon of "brain drain" in Malaysia was analysed, which has

resulted in the continuance of migration of skilled and educated individuals predominantly to developed countries like the United States and the United Kingdom, driven by better career opportunities, higher wages, and improved living conditions. This migration trend has been influenced by systemic ethnic discrimination within Malaysia, particularly affecting non-*Bumiputera* groups, prompting them to seek better prospects abroad.

The World Bank's 2011 report indicated ethnic discrimination as a significant factor contributing to the Malaysian brain drain, with over one million Malaysians residing overseas, a third of whom are part of this skilled diaspora. In response, Malaysia initiated 'brain gain' strategies through agencies like MOSTI and the National Council of Professors, aiming to attract these expatriates back to contribute to national development. However, challenges such as low awareness of these initiatives among the diaspora and unattractive incentives persist, necessitating a more comprehensive approach to make Malaysia an appealing destination for its skilled workforce. The culture of migration from Malaysia to the United Kingdom has historical roots in British colonialism, which established enduring links and influenced migratory trends that persist today. Postcolonial developments have seen Malaysian migration evolve from labour-oriented to education and professional-driven, with the former coloniser's country being a preferred destination due to its quality education and diverse job market.

The part then proceeded to Chapter 2.3 that tackled the landscape of immigration in the United Kingdom through the exploration of migration patterns, frameworks of immigration policies, and identity dynamics among both British residents and immigrant ethnic minorities. This exploration aimed to provide a comprehensive reading of the diverse and dynamic migration trends. The provision of an in-depth examination of the historical context of United Kingdom immigration traced the nation's journey from post-World War II to the modern era. For, as McIntyre articulates:

> [T]hese were momentous events for British and global history. Yet they were so swift, and are so recent, that they remain subject to intense debate as to their sequence, motivation, impact and meaning. (1998: 7)

Indeed, such momentous events relate to a range of topics, including the end of the British empire, the transition to a post-imperial era, shifts in global power dynamics, changes in national identity, and the evolution of immigration policy. The debate surrounding these topics involves different interpretations of the events' significance, their triggers, their consequences for both the United Kingdom and its former colonies, and their lasting implications for global

politics and economics. Thus, the part began by exploring the United Kingdom's imperial past and how its empire-building efforts across continents evolved from a mercantile, settler-focused entity to a multiethnic industrial powerhouse. This historical backdrop set the stage for understanding the immigration patterns that followed, especially the influx of immigrants from the Caribbean, Africa, and the Indian subcontinent, driven by labour shortages and colonial ties.

Chapter 2.3 continued with a section covering the post-World War II era, where substantial labour shortages led to a wave of migration, with the government enacting the British Nationality Act of 1948 to encourage Commonwealth citizens to aid in post-war reconstruction. This era saw the arrival of the Empire Windrush, marking the beginning of the Windrush era, which drastically influenced modern British immigration policies and demographics. The subsequent section explored the evolution of British immigration policies from the 1960s to the 1980s with a shift toward more restrictive measures and a redefined concept of citizenship. The impact of the European Union on British immigration policy was also discussed, examining how EU integration and the right to free movement shaped immigration trends until the Brexit referendum, marking a crucial change in the United Kingdom's immigration landscape. The chapter then transitioned into a section on the 21st century, focusing on the aftermath of Brexit, which led to the end of free movement for EU nationals and the introduction of a points-based immigration system. This new system aimed to manage immigration more effectively, balancing economic needs with public concerns about immigration levels, and represented a significant departure from the EU-centric policies of the past. The following chapter in part 2 analysed the socioeconomic implications of immigration in the United Kingdom, focusing on the labour market and economy. It demonstrated how immigrants, especially from the EU, were generally younger, more educated, and contributed positively to the United Kingdom's economy by filling essential roles in various sectors. The section challenged common misconceptions about immigration, presenting evidence that immigration has had a neutral to slightly positive effect on the labour market and does not significantly affect the employment rates and wages of native workers.

The examination of British identity with the exploration of how historical, regional, and immigrant influences have shaped the national identity was the focus of the succeeding chapter. It discussed the evolving concept of Britishness, influenced by key historical events, and the government's efforts to integrate multiculturalism into the national ethos. The chapter also touched on the diverse perspectives on British identity among different regions and immigrant

communities throughout the ongoing debate between inclusivity and exclusivity in defining Britishness. The identity streams of ethnic minorities in the United Kingdom were detailed, highlighting how various communities from South Asia, the Caribbean, Africa, and other regions contribute to the demographic mix. It explored how these groups navigate their cultural identity, integrate into British society, and influence the nation's cultural evolution. The chapter also discussed the generational differences in identity and integration in correlation with heritage, Britishness, and multiculturalism. The chapter proceeded to address the hurdles faced by immigrants, focusing on challenges in language proficiency, employment, education, social integration, legal issues, housing, and healthcare. The importance of language skills for successful integration and the polarised debate on the economic impact of immigration were discussed. Finally, the social capital necessary for fostering unity among diverse ethnic groups and the ongoing efforts to balance cultural heritage with a sense of unity in a diverse society were highlighted.

In conclusion, the examination of Malaysia's historical context, particularly its colonial past and current sociocultural dynamics, reveals profound impacts on its political, social, and economic landscape. British colonisation shaped Malaysia's hierarchical structures, influencing its agriculture, economy, and ethnic diversity. The nation's complex ethnic composition and efforts to balance cultural preservation with addressing disparities highlight the enduring influence of its colonial legacy. Similarly, the analysis of the United Kingdom's immigration history post-World War II, informed by its imperial past, shed light on the evolution of its immigration policies and the nature of British identity. The transitions from a mercantile empire to a multiethnic industrial powerhouse in the United Kingdom mirrored Malaysia's struggles and adaptations in the face of colonial influences and global changes. I am reminded of Parekh's words in *Race Relations in Britain*, which encapsulate both countries' experiences in terms of history, policy, and identity in shaping their contemporary sociocultural and political realities.

> When one culture is not only publicly recognised but also institutionalised, it becomes the official culture of the community, an expression of its collective identity, and enjoys great prestige, power, state patronage, and access to public resources. By contrast the excluded cultures come to be seen as marginal, peripheral, even deviant and inferior, only worth practising outside the public gaze of society and in the privacy of the family and communal associations. (in Blackstone *et al.*,1998: 8)

His utterance offers a critical lens through which to view the experiences of both Malaysia and the United Kingdom, foregrounding the impact of dominant cultures being institutionalised and recognised officially, which then shapes the collective identity and sociopolitical landscape of a nation. This institutionalisation grants the official culture significant prestige and resources, while marginalising other cultures, relegating them to the periphery of society. In the context of Malaysia and the United Kingdom, this analysis pinpoints how historical policies and cultural dynamics have contributed to the formation of national identities and the handling of ethnic diversity. Both nations have grappled with the legacy of colonialism and the challenges of multiculturalism, where dominant cultures have been privileged, often at the expense of minority groups. Parekh's insight clarifies the constant struggles within these countries to balance unity and diversity, power and marginalisation, in their continuous evolution of sociocultural and political realities.

Thus, this literature review substantiates the research's primary goal: to explore the identity and sense of belonging among the Malaysian diaspora in the United Kingdom, an area with scant research. It aims to bridge the knowledge gap, providing a thorough analysis that enhances the understanding of their experiences. The review investigates Malaysia's historical context, highlighting the profound impacts of British colonialism on its society, the challenges of ethnic diversity, and the country's economic and sociopolitical evolution towards multicultural coexistence. It then transitioned to examining the United Kingdom's immigration history and policies post-WWII, along with the intricacies of British identity, to frame the Malaysian diaspora's experiences. By probing into the lives of the Malaysian diaspora in the United Kingdom, this research aspires to fill a conspicuous void in academia, offering new insights into the diaspora's identity dynamics and their quest for belonging in a multicultural society. This endeavour is not merely an academic exercise; it is a significant stride towards enriching the discourse on migration, identity, and belonging, with the potential to inform and influence policymaking and community engagement in multicultural settings.

PART 3

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

3.1. Introduction to part 3

This part aims to examine the overarching theoretical framework and conceptual analysis of migration, diaspora/transnational, integration/assimilation, sense of belonging and identity construction of immigrants in a foreign land. As a junior researcher on a quest, I am mindful of how research of any kind must be built upon theories and definitions in order to render the body of work analytical, whole, and thus credible. However, in light of the aforementioned indisputable observation regarding the dearth of scholarly works on the subject (outlined in part 4), my stance as a social constructionist engaged in the collection of empirical data through in-depth interviews necessitates an acknowledgment of a subjective perspective on knowledge within the realm of social interchange. Consequently, I found it imperative to contemplate the practical implications of the research. How does one conduct research in projects that tackle pertinent themes? How does one choose concepts/theories that are applicable to a population that is under researched and thus suffers from a shortage of reliable information and data? How does one define, establish definitions and be analytical of the said themes that are fluid and versatile while conducting empirical research using an interpretivist framework? These questions are the bedrock of this part of the thesis, and in order to make this qualitative research demonstrable, I will, conceptually and later on empirically, put forth relevant theories, concepts/themes and studies that have informed this research on identity transformation of Malaysian immigrants in the wake of migration and settlement in the United Kingdom.

The theoretical framework underpinning this research draws extensively on Stuart Hall's seminal concepts of cultural identity and diaspora, which are intertwined with Homi Bhabha's notions of identity, hybridity, and the "Third Space". The synthesis of these theories is further enriched by incorporating K.J. Ratnam's exploration of political identity and loyalty to one's homeland. In tandem, these theoretical underpinnings form a comprehensive framework for the analysis of the subject matter. In extending the theoretical lens to comprehensively examine migration, globalisation, and modernity, this research engages with additional perspectives from scholars such as Arjun Appadurai, whose concept of "ethnoscapes", which elucidates the flow and migration of people across boundaries, adds a crucial layer to understanding the multiplicity of identity in a transnational context. Benedict Anderson's exploration of imagined communities, as well as Benson and O'Reilly's work on lifestyle migration, contribute to the examination of the versatile phenomena under investigation. Moreover, the research incorporates perspectives from scholars like Bhikhu Parekh, Tariq Modood, Richard Race, Meer *et al*., whose research on multiculturalism and education provides a robust foundation for

understanding the sociocultural dynamics at play. Furthermore, this research is enhanced by incorporating insights from various other scholarly works. By integrating these diverse perspectives, the research aims to elucidate the processes through which Malaysian immigrants in the United Kingdom articulate and shape their identities, particularly in the context of the British sociocultural milieu. Through this comprehensive theoretical framework, the study seeks to unravel the (trans)formative aspects of identity within the specific context of the United Kingdom.

To fathom the formation of Malaysian identity, my reflections have led me to believe that it is essential to amalgamate Malaysia's historical trajectory with the processes through which identity is shaped over the course of this history, and to understand how identities undergo transformation as a result of migration. As expounded in the preceding section, migration constitutes a significant facet of Malaysian history, thus warranting focused attention when scrutinising Malaysian immigrants who have established themselves in the United Kingdom. This part explores the interconnections between migration, settlement, the development of a sense of belonging, and the transformation of identity among immigrants, with a specific focus on Malaysians. A comprehensive analysis of these interconnected elements necessitates an interdisciplinary approach that integrates various aspects within the purview of British studies, including history, sociology, anthropology, political science, cultural studies, postcolonial studies, and migration and diaspora studies. Within the realm of British studies, discussions on identity predominantly unfold in the context of migratory movements and the consequential impact of such contingencies on the lives of immigrants. It is crucial to acknowledge that my research operates at a comprehensive level and incorporates historical and social dimensions that allude to the processes of identity transformation and the cultivation of a sense of belonging among immigrants. The acknowledgment of these multidisciplinary perspectives ensures a holistic and nuanced exploration of the dynamics surrounding the formation and evolution of identity within the context of Malaysian immigrants in the United Kingdom.

3.2. Migration and diaspora

The primary objective of this chapter is to initially scrutinise the comprehensive theoretical framework and conceptual analysis encompassing migration, globalisation, integration/assimilation, and diaspora/transnationalism. These theoretical discussions will illuminate specific aspects of identity of the Malaysian diaspora in the United Kingdom. The discourse on migration and diaspora can be viewed as overlapping academic tendencies. These tendencies focus on the creation of diasporic or transnational identities as a consequence of international migration. This phenomenon, which has been occurring since the second half of the 20th century, is also referred to as 'globalisation' within migration studies (Quayson & Daswani, 2013). The tendency also views (ethno-)cultural identity as the primary lens for understanding diasporic identity, referring to individuals who identify themselves as part of a tangible or 'imagined community' (Anderson, 1983). In line with Hall's "becoming" (1990), cultural theorist and anthropologist Appadurai explains that the formation of the diaspora involves a process of becoming when individuals begin to settle in new societies. He further discusses the role of "imagination has become a collective, social fact" (1996: 5), which aids in understanding the complex processes of producing/reproducing and creating/recreating original or new identities in the absence of the old territory. Consequently, the common outcome of these tendencies is the "deterritorialized" and distinct cultural communities, which are diasporic communities that, on the one hand, create a hybrid space merging past and present cultural practices, and on the other hand, maintain a strong sense of belonging even outside the given territory of the nation-state (1996: 38, 52, 199). As Coulmas expresses in *Identity: A very short introduction*:

> In socially relevant domains, identities are borders, borders that separate independent countries, distinct ethnic groups and races, languages and their speakers, genders and sexualities, exclusive clubs, self-governing companies, and autonomous individuals. These units erect and defend their borders jealously. However, fixed as we may imagine them being, these borders are fluid and shifting. (2019: 143)

This articulation asserts that identities, akin to fiercely guarded borders, challenge the notion of fixed boundaries with their fluid and shifting nature. This is certainly pertinent to a discussion of diasporas in general but particularly to the Malaysian diaspora, which embodies a similar nature.

Migration, which will be discussed in the following section, is a complex topic that calls for insights from a range of disciplines. Each discipline brings unique theoretical, methodological, and empirical perspectives to the table. For example, sociologists emphasise the importance of social and human capital and the hurdles faced during integration into new societies. Anthropologists delve into the vast social networks and the role of transnational communities in shaping culture, while political scientists identify gaps in public policies, and legal scholars focus on human and refugee rights. The discourse on diaspora inevitably leads to an exploration of the relationship between diaspora and the nation-state. The literature reveals that the terms 'nation' and 'diaspora' can be defined in multiple ways, with different interpretations emerging based on the viewpoint adopted. The key characteristic that links ethnocultural identity and territory in the formation of diasporic identity is notably inadequate, raising new questions about the established and essentialist interconnection between national identity and a specific geographical territory, known as a nation-state. Hobsbawn (1990) suggests that this paradox almost debunks the myth of the nation-state as a cohesive and homogenous entity, which consequently complicates the study and understanding of (ethno-)cultural identity and sense of belonging. An interdisciplinary approach is required, integrating perspectives from history, geography, social anthropology, cultural studies and political sciences to tackle the theoretical underpinnings of nationalism, transnationalism/diaspora and ethnocultural identity, in the context of globalisation.

Using the social constructionist paradigm, this chapter applies the three interconnected postmodern questions of definition, context, and purpose to the analysis of the Malaysian diaspora in the United Kingdom. Furthermore, this chapter undertakes a critical evaluation of the current literature on theories of migration and integration/assimilation, exploring modern theoretical trends, including the tracing of human experiences, as well as notions such as home, belonging, and diasporic spaces. This evaluation will address the discourse on integration/assimilation as a "deterritorialized" (Appadurai, 1996) form of collective identity. That is to say, I refer to a collective and diasporic identity that appears to function alongside the identity of their host country, without one identity undermining the other. This discourse is part of broader discussions in the fields of migration studies, sociology, and political science, which explore identity, belonging, and citizenship in an increasingly globalised world. It challenges traditional notions of identity being tied to a specific nation-state and unfolds the possibility for multiple, overlapping identities. The objective is also to introduce knowledge of the relatively new diasporic community like the Malaysian community and their engagement

with the host society. This will in turn contribute to the debates on diasporic communities through multiculturalism, integration/assimilation and hybrid space, with this research specifically focusing on the Malaysian diaspora in the United Kingdom.

3.2.1. Migration, globalisation and transnationalism

Diasporic communities often navigate different projections of identities that stem from their original culture and their host culture, resulting from their experiences of migration. The interchange of these two cultural dimensions leads to a dynamic and evolving cultural engagement. As members of diasporic communities, immigrants carry with them a sense of their heritage and traditions from their countries of origin, fostering a connection to their original roots. Simultaneously, their interactions within host societies bring forth new cultural influences, leading to the development of hybrid identities that reflect the blending of both cultural elements—"a reflexive relationship between the local and global [that] produces the hybrid" (Smith, 2009: 3). The relationship between intermingling cultural perspectives shapes the way immigrants perceive themselves and how they are perceived by others within the diverse and multicultural contexts of diasporic communities.

Migration

Migration, which leads to the formation of a diaspora, is a phenomenon that has been a defining feature of human history. Based on the *Oxford English Dictionary* (OED, 2000) definition, it is "[t]he movement of a person or people from one country, locality, place of residence, etc., to settle in another." In other words, it refers to the movement of people from one place to another, whether it be within a country, regionally or across international borders. Theories pertaining to migration derive insights from diverse disciplines within the social sciences, such as anthropology, sociology, political science, and human geography. These theories constitute an expansive conceptual framework encompassing cumulative knowledge, hypotheses, and models aimed at elucidating human migration. This involves identifying the factors propelling individuals to migrate, the patterns dictating their destinations, the ramifications of migration, and other relevant aspects. Migration theories provide a structured framework for understanding the fundamental mechanisms and rationales underlying this phenomenon.

As explained above, the field of migration studies encompasses a range of theoretical frameworks, each presenting unique perspectives and hypotheses to understand the complex phenomenon of human migration. Dating back to 1885, E. G. Ravenstein laid the groundwork with the introduction of the "laws of migration" (Ravenstein, 1885 (2008); Lucassen *et al*., 2010), marking a pivotal moment in the academic exploration of migration patterns. Diverging from a singular focus, various migration theories emphasise different determinants. Economic

factors take centre stage in some theories, with neoclassical economics examining income disparities and labour market conditions (Lewis, 1952; Todaro, 1969; Borjas, 1989; Lucassen *et al*., 2010). Concurrently, the new economics of migration scrutinises diverse market dynamics to elucidate migration patterns (Stark, 1991; Lucassen *et al*., 2010). Furthermore, certain theories, like the dual labour market theory, establish connections between immigration and the structural necessities of contemporary industrialised economies (Piore, 1979; Lucassen *et al.*, 2010). This theory stresses migrant labour and the specific demands of advanced economies, shedding light on the role of immigrants in fulfilling essential functions within these economic structures. Migration theories aim to comprehensively understand the dynamics driving human movement across geographical spaces. They explore economic, social, and political dimensions to unravel the motivations and forces behind migration globally. The ongoing evolution of these theories reflects scholars' continuous efforts to refine and expand the understanding of this aspect of human behaviour.

Migration can occur for various reasons, including economic opportunities, social inequalities, political instability, conflict, family reunification, and environmental factors.

> Migration refers to the cross-border movement of people from a homeland to a location outside that homeland, with the purpose of taking up employment and conducting a daily existence there for an extended period of time. In principle such movement need be no more than an expression of an individual desire for change or a choice of locale. But as a social phenomenon this usually arises from and reflects on economic inequality or inequality of economic opportunity between politically discrete zones – hence economic migration. Such inequalities include differences in workforce requirements, perceptions of differences in standard of living, and perceptions of difference in ideological inclination. (Gupta, 2007: 8)

According to Suman Gupta, a literature and cultural historian, who co-wrote with Tope Omoniyi in *The Cultures of Economic Migration,* the definition of migration as an economic phenomenon is underpinned by three key elements. Firstly, it involves a directional flow of people from a less economically developed country to one that is more economically advanced. Specifically, prospective migrants must perceive a discernible difference in economic conditions between these countries that translates into improvements in their daily lives, encompassing factors like employment prospects, living standards, and societal values.

Secondly, the primary motive for this migration is the pursuit of livelihood enhancement or the improvement of material circumstances. In other words, individuals embark on this journey primarily to secure their means of sustenance or to upgrade their material well-being. Thirdly, this migration leads to an extended period of residence in the host country, distinguishing it from other forms of migration such as lifestyle migration. In contrast, non-economic migration, which is exemplified by lifestyle migration, involves the spatial mobility of "relatively affluent individuals of all ages, moving either part-time or full-time to places that, for various reasons, signify, for the migrant, a better quality of life" (Benson & O'Reilly, 2009: 609). According to sociologists Benson and O'Reilly in *Migration and the search for a better way of life: a critical exploration of lifestyle migration* (2009), lifestyle migration is understood as a type of mobility that is voluntary and motivated by the pursuit of an improved quality of life.

When contemplating the issue of "economic inequality or inequality of economic opportunity" postulated by Gupta as drivers of migration, income inequality naturally stands out as a prominent factor influencing migration patterns. According to neoclassical theories of migration, differences in income between countries serve as a catalyst for migration. However, a comparative study conducted by Massey *et al*. (1993) emphasises four essential elements in a satisfactory theoretical account of international migration: forces promoting emigration; forces attracting immigrants; social and economic structures connecting origin and destination areas, and the motivations of those responding to these forces by migrating. They contend that income differentials alone are inadequate to explain actual migration trends. Instead, they argue for the inclusion of structural forces impeding migration and the aspirations of individuals choosing to stay in response to these forces. Neoclassical economics propels migration and is often referred to as the push-pull theory, with factors that inherently differ in their influence, strength, and intersection within various contexts and among diverse social groups (Lee 1966; Skeldon 1990; De Haas 2011; Schewel 2015). According to these scholars, migrants are compelled to leave the 'global south', the less affluent nations, due to economic pressures and are attracted to the 'global north', the wealthier nations, for diverse economic opportunities. Essentially, this theory contends that individuals relocate from economically disadvantaged regions to more prosperous ones in pursuit of boosted employment prospects, higher incomes, and improved life prospects. As part of a culture of migration (developed in section 2.2.7), this acknowledges how immigrants' identities are shaped through their interpretations of push-pull factors.

Based on the United Nations's *International Migrant Stock* dataset in 2020, an estimated 280 million international migrants migrated in 2020. An approximate 69 million migrants originated from developed regions, and 198 million from less developed countries. Out of these, 1.9 million migrated to Europe from Southeast Asia, and 5 million to North America. The demography for the Malaysian population in Europe is 109, 336, with approximately 6,810 in Germany, 2,901 in France and 811 in Spain. There are an approximately 78,736 Malaysians living in the United Kingdom (see 2.2.7). The comparison between the substantial migration from Malaysia to the United Kingdom and the comparatively minor migration to Spain, France and Germany raises questions about the motivating factors behind Malaysian migration, which extend beyond mere income differences, aligning with Massey *et al*.'s argument. The understanding of the phenomenon of Malaysian migration may hinge on its sociohistorical context, as explored in part 5. Various perspectives view migration as an inherent aspect of life, constituting a continuous social phenomenon deeply ingrained in the societal norms and regulations of both the migrants' country of origin and the host country they are relocating to. Despite differing viewpoints, these approaches share a common goal: to elucidate the migration processes in response to the fundamental questions of why and how migration is sustained, especially in the context of whether globalisation has introduced a new dimension to migration.

Globalisation

As discussed earlier, in the context of globalisation, migration has become increasingly prominent, with millions of people relocating to different parts of the world in search of better prospects and a higher quality of life. This mass movement of people has both positive and negative implications, as it can lead to cultural enrichment, economic growth, and diversity, but also raises challenges related to social integration, labour markets, and border control. Globalisation is defined as "[T]he action, process, or fact of making global; the process by which businesses or other organisations develop international influence or start operating on an international scale" (*OED*). This holds considerable implications for migration dynamics, as it has the potential to enhance the mobility of individuals, commodities, and ideas across international boundaries. For instance, globalisation may result in heightened economic prospects in specific nations, attracting migrants in pursuit of an upgraded living standards or employment opportunities. Conversely, it can also contribute to the displacement of individuals due to factors such as global economic shifts or climate variations. Globalisation is characterised by the interconnectedness and interdependence of nations and cultures on a worldwide scale, involving the exchange of goods, services, information, technology, and

people beyond conventional geographical confines. This phenomenon has been accelerated by advancements in communication and transportation technologies, rendering the world more accessible and interconnected than ever before. While it has ushered in numerous advantages such as increased economic growth and expanded access to a diverse array of products and services, it has concurrently raised concerns regarding issues of inequality, cultural homogenisation, and environmental sustainability. The phenomenon of globalisation significantly influences migration patterns, serving as both a driver and facilitator of the movement of individuals seeking new opportunities or fleeing adverse conditions.

Scholars initially perceived globalisation as a phenomenon that brought the world closer together, creating a "global village" in both thought and action (Martens *et al.*, 2008). However, anthropologists have formulated concepts such as "flows", "mobility", and "movement" (Cunningham & Heyman, 2009). In the same vein, Arjun Appadurai in his conceptualisation of globalisation in *Disjuncture and Difference in the Global Cultural Economy* (1990), contends that globalisation is primarily characterised by disjunction, scalability, and contextuality. Appadurai introduces five fundamental -scapes, explaining how cultures around the world influence each other through "global cultural flows": ethnically (ethnoscapes); technology (technoscapes); media (mediascapes); ideology (ideoscapes), and finance (financescapes). According to Appadurai, globalisation manifests at the junctures and disjunctures between these diverse landscapes, defining "imagination" as a "social fact" and positions this fact at the core of all globalisation processes (1996: 5). Heyman and Campbell, in their 2009 neo-Marxist critique, present a counterargument asserting that among the various -scapes, the financescape holds paramount power in the context of globalisation. They argue that Appadurai's framework exhibits a weakness by not adequately acknowledging the dominance of financescapes over other -scapes. According to their perspective, emphasising the pivotal role of global capital flow allows for the understanding of globalisation as primarily steered by influential individuals and entities leveraging their financial influence to exploit less economically privileged individuals globally. This viewpoint offers insights into phenomena like the rapid accumulation of wealth in the global north, often at the expense of the global south, where individuals frequently receive lower incomes while producing goods for the benefit of the global north. This interpretation views globalisation as a process exacerbating economic disparities through imbalances in financial power.

Additionally, Appadurai's conceptualisation of ethnoscapes posits that "…tourists, immigrants, refugees, exiles, guest workers and other moving groups and persons […] appear

to affect the politics of and between nations to a hitherto unprecedented degree" (Appadurai, 1990: 297). In other words, this perspective demonstrates a departure from the notion of cultures existing in isolation, illustrating a constant interplay between them. Such cultural interchange unfolds through five distinct dimensions of cultural flow. Appadurai acknowledges the enduring presence of rooted communities, which remain in one place for generations without foreseeable plans of relocation. However, he concurrently observes a notable surge in the number of individuals, including refugees/asylum seekers, economic migrants, or tourists, who traverse the globe continually. Their mobility is propelled by diverse factors such as employment opportunities, leisure pursuits, family connections, and compelled migration or displacement from their native lands. This heightened mobility is, in part, attributed to the increased accessibility and affordability of global travel. While many of these individuals carry their cultural identities with them, they also maintain strong ties to their places of origin, giving rise to the phenomena of transnationalism and hybrid identities. This mobility and 'imaginary' rootedness, influenced by economic, social, geographical and political factors, contribute to the evolving landscape of cultural interactions in the age of globalisation where the world becomes "borderless" (Yee & Wong in David *et al*., 2010: 204).

Transnationalism

The burgeoning concept of transnationalism encapsulates the "[e]xtending or having interests extending beyond national bounds or frontiers" (*OED*). This phenomenon, as defined by the OED, entails the extension or cultivation of interests beyond these borders, giving rise to intricate webs of social, economic, and cultural ties that traverse the globe—essentially embodying a "multinational" character. At its core, transnationalism is interwoven with the broader definition of globalisation and migration, encapsulating the experiences of individuals and communities whose heightened global connectivity is forged through cross-border movements. Recent scholarly discourse on transnationalism recognises its integral role within the broader framework of globalisation, establishing the two distinguishing concepts while acknowledging their central interconnection. Klingenberg *et al*. (2020) explain globalisation as a comprehensive phenomenon spanning social, economic, and political domains, fostering increased interaction and interconnectedness among countries and continents. This perspective aligns with the work of Levitt (2001), who similarly underlines the relentless expansion of global interactions at an accelerating pace, encompassing the flow of goods, information, services, financial capital, and people (Li & Teixeira, 2007). However, an alternate viewpoint emerges when examining globalisation, which views transnationalism as focusing on the

movements of individuals and civil society across borders as a result of the aforementioned domains. Scholars such as Kearney (1995) and Peck (2020) delve into the impact of the world's growing interconnectedness on these movements, illuminating the dynamic ways in which people and civil society navigate and transcend national boundaries. This perspective emphasises the agency and adaptability of individuals and communities in responding to the challenges and opportunities presented by an increasingly globalised world.

Vertovec's (2003) robust support for the active involvement of grassroots resources and individuals in transnational activities underlines a pivotal transformation in the constructs of belonging, loyalty, and attachment. The resultant state of being multi-local, as elucidated by Klingenberg *et al*. (2020), situates individuals in multiple geographic locations while maintaining interconnections. The foundation of Vertovec's conceptualisation of transnationalism rests on six theoretical premises, each intricately linked to the transformative potential of cross-border engagements (2009: 4-12). Firstly, the theoretical premise of social morphology explores the ways in which transnational activities contribute to the reshaping of social structures. He contends that these engagements alter the fabric of societal organisation, creating new patterns and configurations. The second premise, type of consciousness, delves into the evolving cognitive frameworks of individuals engaged in transnational activities, highlighting the shift in mindset from a strictly localised perspective to a broader, more globally conscious outlook. The third premise, mode of cultural reproduction, stresses the role of transnational activities in perpetuating and disseminating cultural practices across borders, with the implication that it is not only the preservation of cultural heritage but also its adaptation and evolution in response to transnational interactions. The fourth premise, avenue of capital, explores how transnational engagements impact the flow and distribution of economic resources, encompassing the mobilisation and utilisation of financial capital across borders, influencing economic landscapes at both local and global scales. The fifth premise, site of political engagement, delves into the transformative potential of transnationalism in the political sphere, emphasising how cross-border activities can reshape political affiliations, engagements, and mobilisations, thereby contributing to the evolution of political structures. Finally, the (re)construction of place or locality as the sixth premise draws attention to the transformative impact of transnational engagements on these very concepts. Vertovec posits that meaningful cross-border relationships reconstruct localities by integrating practices and meanings from diverse geographical and historical origins, contending that these six interconnected aspects are transformative, pertinent, and pervasive enough to contribute to

structural changes in society. The continuous and meaningful engagement in cross-border relationships has the potential to broaden, deepen, or intensify ongoing processes of societal transformation. Importantly, the extensive, intensive, and rapid flow of networked information and resources plays a pivotal role in this transformation, highlighting transnationalism as an evolving and influential force capable of catalysing significant societal changes.

Viewed through this lens, transnationalism manifests itself in diverse forms, ranging from the financial support sent by migrant workers to their countries of origin in the form of remittances to the extensive presence and influence of multinational corporations operating on a global scale. It also encompasses the web of cultural exchange and the emergence of hybrid identities that occur when individuals are exposed to a multitude of cultures and ways of life. Transnationalism, in this context, challenges established concepts of identity and belonging, emphasising the crucial need to comprehend the interconnected nature of the globalised world. Central to the understanding of diaspora within the framework of globalisation and transnationalism is the concept of cultural identity, wherein individuals identify with a specific pre-existing or 'imagined' ethnic or cultural community, as conceptualised by Anderson (1983). Within the expansive field of migration studies, which investigates the movement of people across geographical boundaries, a significant focus lies on the examination of diasporas. Diasporas represent scattered populations whose origins trace back to a smaller geographic locale, and this movement may involve the relocation of populations from their original homelands (explored in section 3.2.3).

In the realm of migration studies, diasporas serve as subjects of inquiry to comprehend the cultural, social, and economic ramifications of these population movements. This inquiry spans an exploration of the motivations behind migration, the experiences of migrants, and the consequential effects on both the home and host countries. Crucially, migration studies place a notable emphasis on the examination of how globalisation and transnationalism impact migration patterns. Hall and Appadurai extend the exploration of diaspora formation, characterising it as an ongoing process of becoming, wherein individuals gradually acclimate to new societies and adapt to their surroundings. Additionally, Ralph Grillo's notions of the "demographic situation" of "'there' and 'here'" imply Bhabha's perpetual "state of in-between-ness" (Grillo, 2018: 39-40; Bhabha, 1994). This transformative process is evident in diasporas as a whole, but particularly in the Malaysian diaspora, encompassing Malaysians residing outside their homeland, contributing to the blending and dissemination of Malaysian culture and traditions across international borders. The Malaysian diaspora serves as a tangible

illustration of transnationalism and its impact on cultural interconnectedness in a globalised context. This diasporic phenomenon sets the stage for an exploration of multiculturalism through both assimilationist and integrationist perspectives. The Malaysian diaspora becomes emblematic of the challenges and opportunities posed by the coexistence of various cultures, prompting an examination of how societies navigate cultural diversity. By delving into assimilationist and integrationist viewpoints, one gains insight into the evolving frameworks that shape the interaction between cultural identities in a world characterised by the rise of global connectivity.

3.2.2. Multiculturalism through assimilationist and integrationist perspectives

This section will explore multiculturalism by elucidating the concepts of assimilation and integration, which, although distinct, are closely interrelated. These terms find frequent discourse within the domains of cultural, social, and demographic interactions, particularly in the context of immigration and multiculturalism. However, their applicability extends beyond these specific domains, encompassing a myriad of scenarios where diverse groups or individuals intersect. These perspectives are pertinent to multiculturalism, a phenomenon marked by the coexistence of diverse ethnic, religious, and linguistic groups within a given society. Immigration often serves as a catalyst for multicultural dynamics, prompting societies to grapple with questions of assimilation versus integration. The choices made in this regard significantly influence social cohesion, identity formation, and overall harmony within a community. Furthermore, the application of assimilation and integration extends beyond immigration scenarios to encompass broader social contexts. Interactions between different demographic groups, whether in educational, workplace, or community settings, necessitate a comprehensive understanding of these concepts. The delicate balance between preserving individual identities and fostering collaborative coexistence becomes crucial for building inclusive and harmonious societies.

Multiculturalism

Multiculturalism epitomises the simultaneous presence of diverse cultures, extolling diversity and nurturing cohabitation. Its essence lies in the acknowledgment and reverence of cultural differences inherent in various groups, encompassing their historical narratives, value systems, and customary practices. The overarching objective is to cultivate an environment conducive to the peaceful coexistence of these cultural entities. In a multicultural society, impartiality prevails, ensuring equal treatment and opportunities for all inhabitants, thereby facilitating the pursuit of meaningful and fulfilling lives. This paradigm of multiculturalism entails a form of integration wherein minority cultures need not compromise their identity. It espouses the cultivation of a harmonious coexistence characterised by ethnic and cultural pluralism, wherein various cultural expressions thrive side by side in a symbiotic manner. An alternative conceptualisation of multiculturalism is encapsulated in the metaphorical construct referred to as the “melting pot” (Race, 2015: 16). Within this context, prevalent in multiethnic societies, the eventual consequence often manifests as cultural homogeneity, arising from an assimilative process wherein the dominant culture predominates. From a political philosophy

perspective, multiculturalism pertains to the ideological framework and strategies adopted by a state to navigate cultural diversity within its territorial confines. This may involve the allocation of specific rights to particular groups, permitting a measure of self-governance, and other approaches.

The concept of multiculturalism emerges within the framework of Western liberal democracies, whose societies have progressively absorbed an influx of migrants from various parts of the world. As Joppke and Lukes postulate in *Multicultural Questions* (1999):

> '[M]ulticulturalism' first appeared in Canada and Australia in the early 1970s. After belatedly abandoning their 'whites only' immigration policies, these young immigrant societies called an official multiculturalism to the rescue in order to juggle the incompatible claims of defeated homeland minorities (both Aboriginal and settler), newly entering Asian and other non-European immigrant groups, and their old European immigrant cores. (1999: 3)

Initially stemming from European colonialism, this phenomenon has evolved into a global occurrence where individuals of diverse ethnic, religious, and linguistic backgrounds coexist within nations originally characterised by more homogenous national identities. While this dynamic inherently introduces potential tensions and rivalries, it also offers opportunities for significant cultural enrichment. Societies employ various policy approaches to navigate diversity, with multiculturalism representing just one such strategy. According to Grillo (2018), a critical aspect lies in deconstructing the concept of multiculturalism to distinguish it from alternative policies like assimilation and potentially integration. This deconstruction also involves making nuanced differentiations within multiculturalism itself, acknowledging variations between the "real" and "imagined" manifestations of the concept (Grillo, 2018: 44). This implies a recognition of disparities between the practical implementation of multiculturalism and its perception by "political leaders, the media, and many ordinary citizens" (Grillo, 2018: 44).

This concept may manifest on both a national scale, evident in countries like Canada or Bolivia, and within smaller communities, exemplified by major cities like New York City or London. Its emergence can be spontaneous due to immigration or intentionally cultivated through legislative measures. An illustration of its organic development is found in the coexistence of French and English cultures in Canada, where distinct cultural boundaries merge

(Wayland, 1997; Joppke & Lukes, 1999; Emerson, 2011). Canadian society, often considered progressive and diverse, has embraced multiculturalism since the 1970s and 1980s, positioning itself as an international model for fostering diversity and equity, influencing its welcoming stance towards migrants (Wayland, 1997; Joppke & Lukes, 1999; Emerson, 2011). In Bolivia, a demographic composition rooted in historical origins involves 36 distinct indigenous groups, with Aymara and Quechua communities, along with the mestizo population resulting from Spanish colonisation, playing prominent roles (Grillo, 2018). This diverse makeup shapes Bolivia's contemporary governance approach, particularly in terms of multiculturalism. The country's constitution officially recognises 36 languages, in addition to Spanish, demonstrating a commitment to acknowledging and preserving the cultural and linguistic diversity of its population (Grillo, 2018). Multiculturalism has found resonance in contemporary Malaysian society, reflecting its historical trajectory spanning pre- and postcolonial periods. The significance lies in how Malaysia addresses the multiethnic and multicultural dimensions inherent in its societal fabric. Having experienced phases of governance, colonisation, and multiculturalism, present-day Malaysia still needs to take steps to embrace multiculturalism as the foundational principle of its societal and social structure. This prompts a re-evaluation of multiculturalism within the Malaysian context, exploring its implications and delineating its meaning for Malaysian society.

Multiculturalism primarily aims to foster tolerance and respect for group rights within ethnically and culturally diverse societies, where they may not "necessarily [be] harmonious" (Yee & Wong in David *et al*., 2010: 204). Grillo's characterisation of British multiculturalism as a "negotiated order" indicates the nature of this societal framework (2018: 44). In embracing diversity, multicultural Britain grapples with the challenge of balancing the aspirations of various collectives through ongoing debates (Werbner *et al.*, 2015). The notion of a "mass of contradictions" highlights the competing interests and the constant negotiation required to maintain a semblance of harmony (Grillo, 2018: 44). In line with Yee & Wong (2010), it suggests that multiculturalism may not necessarily result in harmony, rather it is a fluid and evolving process that requires continuous adaptation. In Britain, the term's emergence is linked to postcolonial immigration and ethnic relations, sparking decades of substantial academic and political discourse. This debate has revolved around the question of whether multiculturalism serves as a descriptive portrayal of societal reality or functions as a philosophical ideology guiding the organisation of diverse societies. The confusion surrounding its meaning became

apparent in the response to *The Parekh Report* (2000), a product of the Commission on the Future of Multi-ethnic Britain.

Parekh, who is a prominent political theorist renowned for his major contributions to multiculturalism and political philosophy, was the chair of the Commission on the Future of Multi-Ethnic Britain and his work on *The Future of Multi-Ethnic Britain* report in 2000 stands as one of his most influential contributions. This report, often referred to as *The Parekh Report*, delves deeply into the state of multiculturalism in Britain, analysing the challenges and opportunities presented by the nation's diverse demographics. It proposes a vision of Britain as "a community of communities", where cultural diversity is embraced and seen as a source of national strength. Parekh describes Britain as marked by significant cultural hybridity, where the nation-state coexists with an evolving Britishness. The commission posits that Britishness carries systemic, often unspoken, ethnic connotations, thus being ethnically coded. His recommendations advocate for a reimagining of British national identity, one that is inclusive and accommodating of different cultural backgrounds. The report suggests comprehensive reforms in areas like education, media, and the legal system to foster a more inclusive and cohesive society. Parekh's balanced approach in the report emphasises the importance of recognising and valuing cultural differences while also promoting a shared sense of belonging and citizenship. His work encourages dialogue and mutual respect among different cultural groups, aiming to build a more integrated and harmonious multiethnic Britain. The impact of *The Parekh Report* extends beyond academia into public policy and social discourse, influencing debates on multiculturalism, integration, and national identity in the United Kingdom and beyond. Despite the report's analysis, criticisms emerged, reflecting both confusion about the term multiculturalism and inherent weaknesses in its dominant interpretation and policy translation.

Another prevalent critique contends that multiculturalism has the potential to contribute to social fragmentation. Brian Barry (2001) argues that multiculturalism, while aiming to foster stronger identification with individual cultures, may paradoxically contribute to the creation of divisions in society and the erosion of a shared national culture, further suggesting that this approach has the potential to reinforce cultural stereotypes and perpetuate inequality. Tariq Modood (2007), a prominent British sociologist and political theorist, renowned for his impactful work on multiculturalism, integration, and identity politics in the United Kingdom, with significant contributions to discussions on ethnicity, race, religion, and public policy, suggests that multiculturalism may inadvertently foster essentialist perspectives on culture,

implying inherent shared characteristics among members of a specific group. However, it is essential to recognise that these critiques possess inherent limitations. The imperative for social cohesion does not necessarily mandate a homogeneous society or a singular national identity; instead, it can be grounded in a collective acceptance of diversity. Yee and Wong argue that:

> Tolerance can be defined as the absence of prejudice of what is disliked towards those 'whose practices, race, religion, nationality, etc., are different from one's own' (Robinson *et al*., 2000: 74). [It] involves a conscious rejection of prejudiced attitudes, beliefs and responses. […] full acceptance of others whilst differences between the 'others' and oneself are recognised […] a conscious rejection of biased beliefs and behaviour and the valuing of others irrespective of their colour or creed. (in *David et al*., 2010: 204)

The promotion of social cohesion can coexist harmoniously with the "conscious rejection of biased beliefs" and the "full acceptance" and celebration of diversity. While it may seem that tolerance is fundamental to promoting social cohesion, I concur with Parekh's viewpoint that social cohesion should extend "beyond mere toleration" (2000: 42), progressing towards acceptance and embrace. This approach, in my opinion, offers a more sustainable and enduring foundation for societal harmony. Likewise, multiculturalism, as emphasised by Will Kymlicka (2012), who is a Canadian political philosopher widely known for his influential work in the field of multiculturalism and minority rights, is not inherently aligned with the promotion of essentialist views. Kymlicka emphasises its role in counteracting negative stereotypes by encouraging individuals to accept and embrace diverse cultural practices.

Along the same line as Kymlicka, Parekh emphasises that human beings are "culturally embedded", which should be considered in the context of human rights (2000: 91). He argues that human rights should not be limited to "individualistic and abstract terms" but should also encompass the rights of individuals "as members of religious, cultural and linguistic groups", which encompass rights "to worship, to bear religious insignia, to express cultural identity, and to transmit language and culture to the next generation" (2000: 91). Parekh advocates for a "culturally sensitive" interpretation and treatment of human rights, recognising that different situations may require varied responses (2000: 91). He acknowledges that conflicts between rights need to be settled within a democratic framework reflecting a collective conception of wellbeing, which transcends the scope of human rights alone. Thus, while human rights provide a moral foundation, they do not encapsulate the entirety of public morality, highlighting the

principles of multiculturalism and human rights. Ongoing discussions in academic and policy domains have witnessed calls for the abandonment or declaration of the demise of multicultural policies. Simultaneously, others advocate for redefining and expanding the scope of multiculturalism. The current trajectory leaves the fate of multiculturalism uncertain, with ongoing debates questioning whether it will persist as a redefined and revitalised concept, fortified against its previous limitations.

In the uncertain multiculturalism landscape with notions such as "is multiculturalism dead" and "sleepwalking to segregation", which have been extensively explored (Race, 2015: 41-61), scholars and policymakers are constantly exploring alternative concepts that enlighten the complex processes of societal diversity. Among these are interculturalism, cultural pluralism and transculturalism. These conceptual frameworks represent three distinct approaches for comprehending and addressing cultural diversity, each characterised by unique attributes and focal points. Interculturalism, as articulated by Meer and Modood (2016), underlines the significance of dialogue and equality without imposing one culture's dominance over another through the exploration of diverse strategies aimed at recognising and embracing cultural diversity. Cultural pluralism, as expounded by Emerson (2011) and Meer *et al*. (2016), accentuates the fluid nature of cultural identity and rejects the notion of singular and unchanging cultural identities. Transculturalism, as highlighted by Cuccioletta (2002), points out the continuously evolving nature of cultural identity in a globalised context. In this framework, individual identity is no longer confined to a singular dimension but is shaped and acknowledged in relation to others, resulting in a multidimensional hybridisation of cultures, as Scarpetta articulates, "[w]e are of all the cultures. Each person is a mosaic" (Scarpetta in Cuccioletta, 2002). Of the same mind, During postulates:

> Concepts like hybridization, as they developed out of the notion of "polysemy", return us to a renewed culturalism because they enable us to see how particular individuals and communities can actively create new meanings and cultural products which come from afar. (2010: 6)

While all these conceptual frameworks acknowledge the significance of cultural diversity as a form of polysemic "hybridization", they offer distinct perspectives on how to comprehend and manage this diversity.

In the globalised world, societies have evolved into a mosaic of cultures, demanding strategies to effectively accommodate these differences. While concerns about potential

divisions persist, adopting the right form of multiculturalism can function as a means to cultivate social unity while simultaneously celebrating the invaluable richness of cultural diversity. Multiculturalism champions the harmonious existence and appreciation of diverse cultural identities within a society, positing cultural diversity not as a challenge but as a societal enrichment. This paradigm emphasises the cultivation of tolerance, respect, and equitable engagement among all cultural groups, with the belief that diversity enriches the social fabric. While commended for promoting equality and social acknowledgment, multiculturalism also faces criticism for fostering inequality and social division. The strategies of assimilation and integration stand out as pivotal mechanisms through which multiculturalism is enacted, each with its distinct impact on the melding of cultural identities and the promotion of social harmony. A discussion within this context revolves around the synergy between diversity and social equality. The assertion by Davina Cooper in *Challenging diversity: Rethinking equality and the value of difference* that "[m]any benign forms of diversity depend on greater social equality to come into existence" underpins the intertwined nature of diversity and equality (2004: 196). This interrelation challenges the conventional narrative that achieving equality necessitates a homogenisation of identities, with Cooper advocating a nuanced understanding: "equality functions as a norm, strategy, and aspiration. As such, it does not entail sameness" (2004: 196). Such perspectives offer a critical lens through which the contributions and challenges of multiculturalism can be evaluated, emphasising the necessity for a balanced approach to cultural diversity that respects individuality while promoting collective cohesion. In addressing the vitality of multiculturalism in the contemporary society, my viewpoint counters the notion that "multiculturalism is dead". Instead, I assert that multiculturalism is very much alive, requiring continual reinforcement and evolution to thrive. This evolution may take various forms, including the advancement of cultural pluralism and transculturalism, as society navigates through the complexities of an increasingly interconnected world. These concepts are essential in shaping a more inclusive, dynamic understanding of multiculturalism that adapts to contemporary challenges and opportunities. This continuous effort is essential to prevent "sleepwalking to segregation" which encapsulates the risk of societies drifting towards division in an almost automated, unconscious manner. To avert this passive drift, engaging actively in reinforcing multiculturalism is crucial, ensuring it is not just a passive state but a dynamic process that evolves and adapts to meet the needs of an increasingly diverse global population. This entails a commitment to understanding and addressing the underlying currents that may lead to segregation, whether they are economic, social, or political in nature. The assimilationist and integrationist perspectives, which will be analysed next, represent distinct

methods societies can employ to manage and respond to cultural diversity. These approaches shape the interactions between majority and minority groups, influencing the fluctuations of cultural identity and societal cohesion.

Assimilation

Assimilation is characterised as a unidirectional social dynamic involving the process by which individuals or groups from a minority or foreign cultural background conform to and adopt the cultural norms, values, and behaviours of the dominant or host culture within a given society (Joppke & Lukes, 1999; Modood, 2011; Emerson, 2011; Grillo, 2018). Essentially, it entails the amalgamation of cultural traits from the minority group with those of the majority group, often leading to a gradual merging of the two. Those undergoing assimilation typically exert efforts to acquire proficiency in the language, customs, and traditions of the dominant culture. It is crucial to acknowledge, however, that this perspective does not inherently endorse a *laissez-faire* approach; there may still be expectations and initiatives to promote assimilation in alignment with the majority culture (Modood, 2005; Race, 2015; Meer et al., 2016). Race (2015) highlights the emergence of issues such as resistance to the one-way assimilation process from minority groups, as well as challenges within the education system related to curriculum and structure. The commonly used metaphor to depict this process is the "'melting pot'" (Race, 2015), implying the blending of diverse cultures to form a homogeneous whole. In the context of assimilation, there exists an implicit pressure on minority communities to transform and conform to the predominant cultural identity, often at the expense of their own cultural heritage. This can result in the erosion of cultural identity, traditions, languages, and customs that have been transmitted across generations (Emerson, 2011; Race, 2015).

The idea of assimilation has engendered considerable debate owing to its potential repercussions on cultural diversity and social cohesion. Advocates contend that assimilation fosters unity and a collective sense of identity, contributing to social integration. Social integration, as defined by Woolcock (1998), is the mechanism through which newcomers become part of the socioeconomic fabric of a society by cultivating friendships, acquiring proficiency in the local dialect, and participating in local clubs. Characterised by the extent of interaction among individuals from varied groups on equitable terms, it nurtures a feeling of belonging within the broader society. Typically, the focus is on the process through which immigrants and minority groups integrate into their host country. In the 1920s, Park and

Burgess (1921) expanded the notion of social integration by elaborating on the concept of assimilation, emphasising the cultural dimension of incorporation during this period.

> Assimilation is a process of interpenetration and fusion in which persons and groups acquire the memories, sentiments, and attitudes of other persons or groups, and, by sharing their experience and history, are incorporated with them in a common cultural life. (…) assimilation denotes this sharing of tradition, this intimate participation in common experiences (…). (1921: 735)

Simultaneously, these scholars perceived differences as integral to assimilation, asserting that "[t]he process of assimilation is concerned with differences quite as much as with likenesses" (735). They recognised the potential peril of relinquishing characteristics associated with one's home country, describing assimilation as a negative process leading to denationalisation. Within their conceptual framework, assimilation was elucidated as a transformative process wherein a group assimilates the "memories, sentiments, and attitudes" of another group, thereby integrating into a shared cultural existence. It is posited that a cohesive society is more likely to prosper when its members share a common cultural framework, fostering social mobility. Individuals adopting the dominant culture may find enhanced access to education, employment, and other opportunities, contributing to the overall success and thriving of the society.

As aforementioned, the emergence of the concept of immigrant assimilation during "the first wave of industrial-age migration in the late nineteenth century, occurred against the backdrop of imperialist state rivalry, war, and aggressive nation-building" (Joppke & Morawska, 2003: 4). This signified that, as exemplified by Race (2015), immigrants arriving in the United States of America were encouraged to adopt American values and customs, often at the expense of preserving their original cultural identities, within a metaphorical melting pot. The objective was to construct a cohesive American identity grounded in a shared culture. The ethos 'American Dream' was closely associated with this melting pot metaphor, aligning with assimilationist ideals. In France, the assimilationist perspective is overt and integral to *laïcité*, a foundational principle of French Republicanism, wherein the "notion of citizenship leads to some identities and social categories being foregrounded, others downplayed" (Grillo, 2018: 366). Emerson cites *Article 21.24 of Loi 2003-119* concerning naturalisation conditions:

> No one can be naturalised if he does not justify his assimilation to the French community, notably by a sufficient knowledge, according to his condition, of the French language and the rights and duties conferred by French nationality. (2011: 16)

It is evident that acquiring French nationality requires demonstrating assimilation into the French community, including proficiency in the French language and a comprehensive understanding of the rights and obligations associated with French citizenship. What is more, Lassalle points out:

> The analysis of census statistical categories clearly shows that the fundamental differences are not, as in France for example, between nationals and non-nationals, but rather between the indigenous white population and other citizens from different ethnic backgrounds.[29] (*my translation*) (2009: 122)

Lassalle distinguishes the French and the United Kingdom's unique categorisations, emphasising differences between citizens/non-citizens and indigenous Whites and other ethnic citizens, a distinction underscored by policies like the 1962 Commonwealth Immigration Act, which regulated immigrant work rights. In the United Kingdom, the oversight of immigration, initiated post-World War II, was formalised through the 1962 Commonwealth Immigration Act, which mandated immigrants from Commonwealth countries to obtain work vouchers. This requirement aimed to ensure that prospective immigrants possessed skills currently in demand within the country. The end of global transnational migration compelled the government to address not only the employment aspects but also the broader social implications of immigrants residing in the United Kingdom.

Critics of assimilation argue that it can perpetuate cultural dominance, marginalise minority communities, and lead to the erasure of valuable cultural diversity. Those from minority backgrounds may feel pressured to conform to the majority culture, resulting in feelings of alienation, loss of identity, and a sense of not fully belonging to the majority population. The terms 'West Indian', 'Black' and 'Asian' have also sparked controversy, with Brah arguing that the terms arose to shed light on the experiences of African-Caribbean and

[29] Original text: « L'analyse des catégories statistiques du recensement montre bien que les différences fondamentales ne se situent pas, comme en France par exemple, entre les nationaux et ceux qui ne le sont pas, mais entre les Blancs autochtones et les autres citoyens issus d'ethnies différentes. »

South Asian communities in post-war England (in Donald & Rattansi, 1992). The term assimilation was contentious because it was perceived as both racially biased and inadequate in recognising the nuances and cultural diversity within these communities (in Donald and Rattansi, 1992). Furthermore, the concept of assimilation aims to preserve the majority culture and identity and thus assumes that the majority culture is superior, setting the standard for what is considered the norm. This perspective overlooks the value and richness of different cultural perspectives, which are integral to a pluralistic and inclusive society.

Indeed, assimilation poses challenges in finding a delicate equilibrium between preserving cultural diversity and fostering social cohesion. Societies, such as Canada, advocating for a more inclusive approach to multiculturalism may opt for the concept of cultural pluralism (Coelho, 1998; Joppke & Lukes, 1999: 16; Gagnon & Iacovino in Meer *et al*., 2016) in place of assimilation. Cultural pluralism, as part of a governmental strategy, seeks to instil a strong sense of allegiance among citizens to Canada as a unified political entity (Coelho, 1998; Gagnon & Iacovino in Meer *et al*., 2016). Embracing cultural pluralism entails endorsing the coexistence of diverse cultural identities, where each group is esteemed and appreciated for its distinct contributions to the broader societal fabric. The idea is rooted in the understanding that "[t]he ideal of equality cannot be achieved if citizens are forced to conform to a civic denial of cultural identity" (Gagnon & Iacovino in Meer et al., 2016: 108). Recognising and celebrating cultural diversity can cultivate social harmony, fostering opportunities for cross-cultural exchange and understanding. Cultural pluralism allows societies to create an environment wherein individuals are encouraged to preserve their cultural heritage while actively participating in the overarching cultural mosaic of the nation. While promoting social integration, cultural pluralism does raise concerns regarding cultural dominance and the potential erosion of cultural diversity, as there is a risk that "[a] society that is marked by cultural pluralism [may have] groups that do not want to share their cultural practices with others" (Spinner-Halev in Joppke & Lukes, 1999: 66). Despite these apprehensions, embracing cultural pluralism may present a more inclusive approach that recognises and celebrates the distinctive contributions of diverse cultural identities, leading to a more harmonious society. In the words of Gagnon and Iacovino, "Unity [is when] they belong to a single community called Canada, and actually participate in the general affairs of the all-encompassing polity" (in Meer et al. 2016: 129). The understanding of unity underlines the idea that true cohesion arises not just from the acknowledgment of cultural diversity but from

the active involvement and shared responsibility of individuals in shaping the destiny of the collective political entity.

Integration

Integration involves a reciprocal process of social interaction, requiring active participation and contribution from both majority and minority community members (Modood, 2005; Race, 2015; Meer et al., 2016). This approach features the coexistence and amalgamation of diverse cultural identities within a society, while preserving their individual characteristics. Often regarded as a more inclusive strategy, integration promotes diversity and cultural exchange. In contrast to assimilation, which aims for a homogenous society, integration values the importance of maintaining cultural diversity and advocates for a more pluralistic and multicultural approach to societal cohesion. The metaphor "mosaic" (Race, 2015: 39) is frequently employed to illustrate integration, suggesting that society resembles a multi-coloured mosaic where each cultural group retains its unique identity and characteristics, contributing to the larger unified whole. In this framework, each cultural element remains distinct and visible, forming a harmonious society. Similarly, the "salad bowl" metaphor (Race, 2015: 39) portrays integration as a blend of diverse cultural components, akin to a salad where each element retains its distinct flavour and texture. These components complement each other, creating a diverse and harmonious combination. Integration sees cultural diversity as an asset rather than an impediment to societal progress, advancing the notion that a cohesive society can be achieved by valuing and respecting the various cultural backgrounds of its members.

Certain scholars still perceive integration as a form of assimilation. Building upon Modood's perspective on integration, Race argues that "integration, like assimilation, [is] a consensual or even conditional 'two-way' relationship […] controlled by institutions [and] nation state" (2015: 20). In essence, this implies that external entities, such as institutions and the nation-state, establish specific conditions or guidelines that must be adhered to within the relationship. Moreover, the relationship itself is subject to the legal and regulatory framework of the nation-state. Within British policy discourses, the concept of integration is commonly presented in contrast to assimilation, serving the purpose of clarifying the preferred societal approach. The notable 1966 speech by Roy Jenkins, who was the Home Secretary at that time, defines integration "[…] not as a flattening process of assimilation but as equal opportunity, accompanied by cultural diversity, in an atmosphere of mutual tolerance" (Jenkins, 1967: 267). In alignment with Modood's viewpoint, this statement accentuates the potential efficacy of

integration policies within a context embodied by a two-way relationship governed by specific conditions and marked by mutual toleration instead of incorporation. While recognising the potential for cultural diversity, it also emphasises the continued control and regulation exerted by the nation-state.

An alternative viewpoint suggests that across successive generations, immigrants undergo social, economic, and cultural assimilation into the host society. Integration is conceptualised as a multicultural process involving the blending of cultures. In this perspective, immigrants not only adjust to the norms of the host society, but they also contribute to reshaping the host society by introducing their unique cultural elements, experiences, and values, leading to a diverse cultural world (Joppke & Lukes, 1999; Joppke & Morawska, 2003; Grillo, 2018; Race, 2015). One of the key aspects of integration involves acknowledging the entitlement to cultural identity for every individual, irrespective of their heritage. It cultivates an atmosphere that promotes the preservation and dissemination of cultural traditions, languages, and customs, while simultaneously facilitating interaction and mutual learning among diverse cultural communities. Numerous multicultural societies, exemplified by Canada, advocate for integration as a means to celebrate diversity and facilitate the full engagement of various cultural groups in the social, economic, and political realms of the nation. In the aftermath of World War II, Australia dismantled the White Australia Policy and officially embraced multiculturalism in 1972. Subsequently, the country formulated diverse immigration programs targeted at supporting migrants and refugees. Moreover, Australia has instituted anti-discrimination policies, exemplified by initiatives like The Strong and Resilient Communities (SARC) Activity (Department of Social Services, Australian Government). A parallel example is observed in Singapore, which, owing to its extensive history of immigration akin to Malaysia, stands as a diverse nation accommodating Chinese, Malay, and Indian populations. Acknowledging this cultural diversity, Singapore has designated multiple official languages and actively participates in various cultural festivals to honour the traditions and heritage of its multicultural society. In an integrated society, policies and initiatives are implemented to facilitate cross-cultural interactions, foster cultural exchange, and ensure equitable opportunities for all citizens, regardless of their cultural backgrounds. Education assumes a pivotal role in integration by cultivating intercultural understanding and appreciation, thus nurturing a national identity that is inclusive of diverse cultural expressions (Race, 2015). Integration further acknowledges the dynamic and evolving nature of cultural dynamics. As societies undergo transformations due to factors such as migration, globalisation, and other

influences, new cultural elements are introduced, contributing to the continuous enrichment of the cultural landscape.

While integration aims to create a more inclusive and harmonious society, it is not without its challenges, particularly when addressing issues of inequality, discrimination, and social exclusion, with the potential of emulating notions like “self-segregation” and “parallel lives” (Cantle in Race, 2015: 47). The concept of cultural pluralism, explored earlier, found its roots in Canada, where it gave rise to the metaphors of the multicultural ‘mosaic’ and the ‘salad bowl’ (Day, 2002; Robinson, 2007 in Race, 2015). These metaphors were coined to represent the blending of diverse identities and a celebration of cultural diversity. They stood in contrast to the assimilationist melting pot, emphasising a more inclusive and multicultural approach (Race, 2015). By embracing the ‘mosaic’ and ‘salad bowl’ approaches, societies can move towards a more empathetic and interconnected future, where cultural diversity is celebrated and seen as a source of strength and vitality.

On the whole, assimilation and integration represent distinct paradigms for managing cultural diversity within societies, exerting substantial influence on both majority and minority communities and shaping their collective participation in the broader societal fabric. Despite sharing the overarching objective of achieving social cohesion, these approaches diverge significantly in their foundational principles, ensuing outcomes, and consequential implications. The assimilationist perspective ardently advocates for the absorption of minority groups into the dominant culture, underscored by an emphasis on newcomers adopting the language, values, and customs of the majority. The acceptance of individuals within the societal framework is often contingent upon meeting specific criteria aligned with prevailing cultural norms, subsequently posing potential risks of cultural homogenisation and the stifling of minority cultural expressions, ultimately jeopardising broader cultural diversity. In contrast, the integrationist perspective champions the coexistence of diverse cultural identities within society, fostering an environment of mutual understanding and cooperation. Diverging from the assimilationist ethos, integration values and celebrates cultural diversity, placing emphasis on identifying common ground and fostering unity while concurrently respecting and appreciating the distinctive contributions of each cultural group. The ramifications of such an integrative approach can manifest in the cultivation of a more inclusive and harmonious societal milieu that derives strength from the richness of diverse perspectives.

In sum, the discourse extends its purview to delve into the interaction between cultural identity, national identity, and citizenship. Assimilation tends to yield a singular, dominant national identity, potentially neglecting the diverse backgrounds and experiences of all citizens. On the other hand, integration supports the cultivation of a more inclusive national identity that incorporates and celebrates the unique contributions of diverse cultural communities, placing value on their cultural identity. The discourse further explores the undercurrents of multiculturalism, wherein assimilation perceives it as a potential source of conflict, aiming to assimilate minority cultures into the majority culture. In contrast, integration perceives multiculturalism as a strength, contributing to societal enrichment. Identifying cultural diversity as conducive to creativity, understanding, liberalism, and social cohesion, integration aligns with liberal values that accentuate individual rights, freedom, and equality. Acknowledging the multifaceted nature of multiculturalism's support stemming from various political ideologies, the discourse raises the importance of multiculturalism as opposed to monoculturalism. While monocultural approaches may achieve a semblance of social cohesion by fostering uniformity, they run the risk of generating tensions, marginalisation and segregation among minority groups pressured to relinquish their cultural identity (Cantle, 2004, 2011; Race, 2015). Furthermore, idealising the past and perceiving foreigners as a threat to a "dream of a mono-cultural country that never was", must come to the realisation that, akin to individuals, a country has multiple evolving identities (Spencer in Blackstone *et al.*,1998: 90).

The discourse also accentuates the major role of community cohesion within the integrationist and multicultural perspectives. The term 'community cohesion' developed by Ted Cantle for the *Cantle Report* 2001 in response to the ethnic disturbances that occurred in several northern towns and cities in England in 2001, challenges traditional multiculturalism by emphasising contact, unity, and understanding among diverse communities (Cantle, 2001, 2004, 2006, 2007, 2011). The approach, adopted by the British government, promotes cross-cultural programmes to reduce prejudice, address inequalities, and build support for diversity, marking a departure from past practices towards a more progressive form of multiculturalism. In this respect, embodying a profound sense of shared belonging derived from cultural similarities, values, and aspirations, holds particular significance in multicultural societies and among ethnic minority groups. Community organisations emerge as critical agents in nurturing cohesion through initiatives promoting social integration, raising awareness about pertinent issues, and engaging community members in diverse programs and activities. For example, the establishment of the Community Cohesion Review Team (CCRT), as a result of the 2001 riots

in various parts of England, aimed to recognise exemplary practices, address essential policy matters, and explore fresh and innovative perspectives within the realm of community cohesion (*Cantle Report*, 2001). The report stated that the team engaged with local community leaders, voluntary and faith organisations, the Commission for Racial Equality (CRE) and Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) organisations, as well as Government Offices, including officials responsible for implementing regeneration programs, along with youth and community workers. Although efforts to promote lasting community cohesion demand continual and sustained commitment at local and national levels, active participation is essential from all parties in order to achieve effective cohesion (Lynch in *Cantle Report*, 2001). What is more, Forrest and Kearns cautioned against exclusively focusing on disadvantaged areas; a comprehensive approach considering the dynamics, similarities, and differences between neighbourhoods was recommended to avoid a narrow focus on deficiencies (*Cantle Report*, 2001). According to Garbaye and Latour, after the 2001 riots, policies like "community cohesion" and "shared values" suggested multiculturalism encouraged segregation, with Muslim leaders criticised for promoting illiberal values (2016: 11). Post-7/7 bombings, the PREVENT programme aimed to promote community cohesion and counter extremism but faced criticism for "stigmatising at the outset Muslim communities" and blurring social work with surveillance (Garbaye & Latour, 2016: 12). Despite 2011 revisions to broaden PREVENT's focus, "ethnicised policymaking remain[ed]", maintaining the association of terrorism with Muslim populations (Garbaye & Latour, 2016: 12). Britain's approach highlights a tension between promoting diversity and addressing security threats, indicating a complex evolution in policy with lasting implications. However, while visually evocative, metaphors such as the 'melting pot', 'mosaic', and 'salad bowl' are deemed to possess limited efficacy in capturing the complexities of actual social and cultural dynamics. In the British context, policy debates have transcended these metaphors, shifting towards the endorsement of culturally diverse values as integral to community cohesion, as pointed out by Race (2015). While community cohesion, as articulated by Cantle, challenges traditional multiculturalism by emphasising contact, unity, and understanding among diverse communities, it is imperative to explore alternative lenses. In this vein, the diaspora framework becomes particularly pertinent for understanding the nuances of identity transformation and the sense of belonging among immigrants in the United Kingdom. As I navigate through this theoretical terrain, the perspective of "unhomeliness" in the diasporic migrant situation offers a unique lens to examine the dynamic forces of immigrant communities' sense of belonging and their evolving identities within the multicultural landscape of the United Kingdom.

3.2.3. "Unhomeliness" in the diasporic migrant situation

The concept of "unhomeliness" in the context of the diasporic migrant situation is deeply rooted in the experience of displacement, cultural dislocation, and the quest for a sense of belonging. This term, introduced by Bhabha (1994) in his exploration of hybridity and the "unhomely" in postcolonial literature and culture, is also closely associated with the work of several scholars including Ashcroft *et al*. (2004), Bressler (2007), Chun (2014), Tyson (2014). Rooted in cultural and postcolonial theory, this concept explores the repercussions of colonialism, migrant situations, and globalisation on identity and culture.

"Unhomeliness"

Dillon presents Schultz's meaning of 'home' which carries "different things to different people" (2020: 288). It can mean something to someone "who has never left it", something else to someone "who dwells far from it", and quite another to someone "who returns" (2020: 288). Dillon interprets the concept of 'home' as a subjective experience that varies based on one's relationship with it. Bhabha (1994) introduces the notion of 'home' within colonial and postcolonial understandings of migrant situations. He describes this as "unhomeliness", "the condition of extra-territorial and cross-cultural initiations" (1994: 9), where the border between home and the outside world becomes blurred. He uses this term which has its roots in Freud's concept of "*unheimlich"* (1994: 10) in German, capturing the emotional and psychological aspects of displacement that come from trying to navigate and reconcile different cultural norms, values, and expectations. In opposition to "*unheimlich"* is the feeling of being at home or "*heimlich*" (1994: 195) which indicates a sense of familiarity, comfort, and belonging. "Unhomeliness" delineates the dislocating and disorienting experiences of migrants, and a sense of unbelonging or feeling out of place in one's environment, generating a sense of unfamiliarity. The feeling of being "unhomed" (1994: 9) arises from the clash of cultural elements, the tension between the familiar and the unfamiliar, and the negotiation of identities that are often caught between two or more cultural identities.

Immigrants frequently struggle in the process of integration into their new country of residence, often experiencing feelings of isolation and cultural disconnection. Failure to integrate runs the risk of a profound sense of cultural displacement and alienation, prompting a deeper reflection on one's personal identity and social position. As a result, immigrants might find that their new residence is somewhat unwelcoming to their identity, ultimately resulting in a feeling of "unhomeliness". Bhabha's (1994) argument that the feeling of being "unhomed"

is different from homelessness is a profound one. It is not about the physical absence of a home, but rather a psychological state of feeling out of place or not belonging. The notion of being "out of place" (Said, 1999) or "displaced" echoes Hall's own diasporic experience "all through [his] life" between Jamaica and England—between British culture and black culture (Les Back & Hall in Morley, 2008: 277). Tyson further emphasises this by describing immigrants who feel "unhomed" as "psychological refugees" (2014: 421). Tyson's use of "psychological refugees" suggests that individuals in the diasporic context face profound psychological challenges akin to refugees, underscoring the deep impact of displacement and cultural dislocation. This term implies heightened psychological distress and disorientation for those detached from their cultural roots, enriching the understanding of the emotional complexities in diasporic experiences and the struggles individuals encounter in adapting to new cultures and forming identities in unfamiliar environments. Consequently, "unhomeliness" captures the emotional and mental dislocation experienced by these immigrants, who, despite having a physical place to live, feel internally displaced due to the clash of cultural identities and the lack of acceptance in their new environment. Thus, it highlights how "unhomeliness" makes them feel like strangers even within their own homes, creating a dilemma surrounding their cultural identities.

Harmonising with Bhabha and Tyson, Bressler (2007) and Chun (2014) suggested that the state of "unhomeliness" is characterised by a feeling of being neither fully anchored in one's original culture nor entirely assimilated into the new one. Not only is this condition about geographical or physical displacement, but it also encompasses psychological aspects. It arises from internal psychological conflict as well as the stress related to cultural disruption. This dual struggle can lead to a profound sense of disorientation and alienation, further intensifying the feeling of being "unhomed". In this context, Bhabha (1994) posits that unhomeliness goes beyond physical displacement and into the transition from one culture to another. Consequently, the concept of "unhomeliness" can be seen as the inability of a new place in a foreign land to fully replace an immigrant's original home, often due to the emotional ties that bind them to their birth country. This view is consistent with the insights of Ashcroft *et al.* (2004), who contend that migration is not just about the physical movement of people from one place to another. It extends to involve deep-rooted issues related to identity, home, and memory arising from this geographical dispersal. Hence, the state of being "unhomed" encompasses more than mere physical displacement; it involves the navigation of emotional and psychological terrain inherent in departing one's country of origin and acclimating to a

new cultural milieu. To capture the essence of "unhomeliness" is to associate it with identity crises and the manifestation of conflict between one's cultural or national identity and the need to adapt to a new cultural context. This struggle to reconcile one's old and new identities can be emotionally taxing. As a result, the "state of in-between-ness" (Grillo, 2018: 39-40; Bhabha, 1994) and uncertainty marks the diasporic journey, highlighting the difficulties of forming a cultural identity in the face of cultural dislocation. It is a 'testing ground' of resilience and adaptability for immigrants and their diasporic experience as they manoeuvre around these complex emotional and psychological landscapes.

The diasporic migrant experience

The concept of diaspora has been widely discussed. It broadly refers to the dispersion or scattering of a particular group of people from their homeland to various locations around the world, who share a common cultural, ethnic, or national background, often rooted in historical events. As the discourse on diasporas expanded to encompass other instances, it initially remained anchored to a conceptual homeland—the Jewish case, along with other classical diasporas such as the Armenian and Greek ones (Kalra *et al*., 2005; Brubaker, 2005; Cohen & Fischer, 2019). These served as reference points in the early stages of diaspora when discussing diasporans who must negotiate the disparity between an imagined homeland and the practical "step-homeland", which denotes a relationship imposed by external factors, lacking inherent familial ties and posing challenging adjustment processes (Kasbarian, 2019: 359). As these discussions progressed, historians introduced the African diaspora and the Palestinian diaspora, modelled after the Jewish case. The notion of the trading diaspora, or what Armstrong (1976) terms as "mobilised diaspora", was built on another facet of the Jewish experience, as well as the Greek and Armenian experiences (Brubaker, 2005: 2). The Chinese, Indians, Lebanese, Baltic Germans, and Hausa of Nigeria are among those frequently cited as trading diasporas (Kalra *et al*., 2005; Brubaker, 2005; Cohen & Fischer, 2019). In several recent extensions of the term, "long-distance nationalists" by Anderson (1983) have been identified as diasporas due to their sustained engagement in homeland politics which includes Albanians, Hindu Indians, Irish, Kashmiris, Kurds, Palestinians, Tamils, and others (Brubaker, 2005: 2; Cohen & Fischer, 2019). Furthermore, the term diaspora has been expanded to include labour migrants who maintain emotional and social ties with their homeland to some extent. This conceptualisation of diaspora encompasses Algerian, Bangladeshi, Filipino, Greek, Haitian, Indian, Italian, Korean, Mexican, Pakistani, Puerto Rican, Polish, Salvadoran, Turkish,

Vietnamese and many other migrant populations (Kalra *et al*., 2005; Brubaker, 2005; Cohen & Fischer, 2019).

As defined by Ashcroft *et al*:

> Diasporas, the voluntary or forcible movement of peoples from their homelands into new regions, is a central historical fact of colonisation." (*Postcolonial Studies: The Key Concepts*, 2007: 68)

In examining the concept of (recent) diaspora, one can discern a pervasive theme of uncertainty and cultural fragmentation. Diaspora is closely intertwined with the historical backdrop of colonialism, which precipitated the global dispersion of individuals due to varied circumstances, encompassing voluntary or forced migrations, conflicts, economic opportunities, or environmental factors. Ashcroft *et al*. recognise diaspora and colonialism as significantly more complex. The distinction between diasporic populations, whether settlers, migrants, transported criminals, slaves, or labourers, becomes inconsequential, as the noteworthy aspect lies in colonialism's capacity to engender diverse forms of power compelling people to relocate. Consequently, the resultant diasporic culture inherently incorporates myriad elements, including mobility, homeland imagination, sense of tradition and culture, migrant situations, and responses to their current residences. In line with this perspective, Brubaker, in *The 'diaspora' diaspora*, highlights the common understanding of diaspora through three core elements: "dispersion in space", "orientation to a homeland" and "boundary-maintenance" (2005: 5-6). Dispersion, the most widely accepted criterion, spans forced or traumatic movements across borders or metaphorical extensions within state borders. Homeland orientation involves attachment to a real or imagined homeland, but recent discussions have shifted focus away from this criterion. Boundary-maintenance, the third element, entails preserving a distinctive identity in relation to host societies. Brubaker emphasises the three defining elements of diaspora which reveal a comprehensive perspective to comprehend the diasporic experiences through the examination of these facets, establishing the groundwork for a more analytical evaluation of the diaspora concept (Brubaker, 2005).

The formation of diasporic communities arises from migrant situations, wherein members, deeply connected to their birth country emotionally and socially, play a key role in contributing to and shaping the culture, economy, and politics of both their host countries and countries of origin. Diasporic communities sustain a "relationship to the homeland" either physically or imaginatively, in order to have a connection to their cultural and ethnic origins,

even when dispersed geographically (Safran in Weiner & Richards, 2008: 103). As mentioned previously, within the diasporic migrant experience, individuals or communities grapple with profound displacement, disorientation, and a sense of being "unhomed" as they navigate migration and cultural adaptation. These diasporas serve as reservoirs of strength and resilience, fostering tight-knit communities, establishing support networks, safeguarding and transmitting cultural traditions, customs, languages, and identity across generations, and contributing to the development of both host and home countries through remittances and advocacy efforts. In the age of globalisation, these transnational connections bear significant political, economic, and social implications, exemplifying the enduring ties that bind people in the "borderless" world (Yee & Wong in David *et al*., 2010: 204). As individuals migrate and form cohesive groups of shared cultural backgrounds for support, this serves to mitigate some challenges associated with "unhomeliness". Migrant situations encompass a spectrum of experiences, ranging from the difficulties and uncertainties of acclimating to a new country to the pursuit of enhanced opportunities, safety, or a sense of belonging. These encounters pose various challenges, encompassing adaptation to new cultures, languages, and legal systems. Individual capacities for adaptation vary, yielding both positive and negative outcomes. Diasporic communities function as cultural conduits, aiding members in navigating the intricacies of their new environments and exemplifying resilience and adaptability as crucial in addressing the "unhomeliness" experienced in unfamiliar settings. The concept of "unhomeliness" is tied to cultural hybridity, wherein individuals or communities integrate elements from both their homeland and host culture into their identity, leading to sentiments of estrangement and unease as they grapple with multiple cultural identities. The migrant experience of "unhomeliness" bears political and social implications, influencing issues such as multiculturalism, cultural preservation, and integration policies in host countries to create inclusive and supportive environments for diasporic immigrant communities.

By and large, the concept of "unhomeliness" is a significant aspect of the diasporic migrant experience. These concepts are interconnected because they all relate to the experiences and feelings associated with migration and displacement. "Unhomeliness" describes the emotional and psychological aspects of feeling "unhomed" in one's current environment, while migrant situations and diaspora are broader terms that encompass the social, economic, and cultural aspects of migration and the dispersal of communities. The relationship between cultural identities, displacement, and the search for belonging in new and often unfamiliar environments are represented. Together, these concepts help to understand the

convoluted nature of migration and its impact on individuals and societies as a whole. By addressing issues of “unhomeliness”, there is a greater understanding of how societies and individuals work toward better inclusivity and support for those navigating the challenges of migration and cultural adaptation. In the forthcoming section, the exploration of the concepts of “Third Space” and hybridity will further illuminate the dynamic forces of identity and cultural practices in the diasporic experience.

3.2.4. "Third Space" and hybridity

The concepts of "Third Space" and hybridity are often used in postcolonial studies and sociolinguistics (e.g., creolisation, patois, etc.) (Easthope, 1998; Kalra *et al*., 2005; Kalua, 2009; Gabriel *et al*., 2012). Conceptualised by Bhabha in 1994, he views "Third Space" as an "in-between" space in which identities, social, and cultural practices are characterised by "hybridity".

> It is that Third Space, though unrepresentable in itself, which constitutes the discursive conditions of enunciation that ensure that the meaning and symbols of culture have no primordial unity or fixity; that even the same signs can be appropriated, translated rehistoricized and read anew. (1994: 37)

Within this "Third Space", individuals from disparate realms of experience, including those who face oppression or marginalisation and those who contribute to its perpetuation, can momentarily come together, free from the usual constraints of their respective statuses. The concept of "Third Space" is a meaningful lens through which to examine diasporic communities and their complex navigation of cultural identity. "Third Space" represents a symbolic location of cultural exchange, reflecting conditions and locations of social and cultural exclusion. It explains the uniqueness of each person, actor, or context as a hybrid. This theory is filled with ambiguities and suggests that every individual is a hybrid of their unique set of affinities—a form of "polysemy" (During, 1993: 6), which can include factors such as nationality, ethnicity, language, and other aspects of identity. It represents a range of cultural creativity, where elements from different cultural backgrounds converge to create hybrid identities and cultural expressions. In this space, individuals and communities have the agency to redefine and reconstruct their cultural affiliations. Moreover, the "Third Space" offers a unique dimension to diasporic identity, in that it refers to the creation of an individual or collective space that lies beyond the confines of traditional cultural boundaries. Citing Bhabha:

> [I]n the moment of transit where space and time cross to produce complex figures of difference and identity, past and present, inside and outside, inclusion and exclusion. For there is a sense of disorientation, a disturbance of direction, in the 'beyond': an exploratory, restless movement caught […] here and there, on all sides, […] hither and thither, back and forth. (1994: 1)

I define this freedom of space as a *hybrid space* or *own space*, where cultural elements blend, and new identities and cultural expressions are conceived, giving birth to a new kind of space.

In this space, diasporic individuals are able to form a sense of belonging and agency, crafting their own cultural identity that transcends the binary notions of home and host.

Bhabha and Hall recognise the centrality of cultural identity in the context of diaspora. Hall posits that cultural identity is not a static or singular concept; rather, it is fluid and shaped by a variety of factors including historical experiences, social contexts, and personal narratives —"it's always hybrid" as "each of these identity-stories is inscribed in the positions we take up and identify with, and we have to live this ensemble of identity-positions in all its specificities" (Hall & Chen in Morley, 2019: 204). As discussed earlier, in the context of diaspora, cultural identity takes on additional layers of complexity where diasporic communities carry with them their unique cultural heritage, forming an integral part of their identity and providing a sense of belonging and affiliation. However, as diasporic communities establish residence in new environments, they invariably confront distinct cultures and social norms, instigating a process of cultural adaptation or acculturation. This transformative phenomenon entails the assimilation of elements from the host culture into their own, culminating in the development of a hybrid cultural identity that amalgamates facets of both their native culture and the adopted one. This process, inherently characteristic of diasporic communities, underlines a unique experience and comprehension exclusive to their identity and collective space.

While this hybridity is enriching in many ways, it also has a challenging dimension. On the positive side, hybridity is depicted as a force that gives rise to unique cultural expressions and contributes to the diversity of the host country's culture. The blending of different cultural elements is seen as a source of enrichment, fostering a cultural landscape that is both lively and diverse. However, the potential difficulties associated with hybridity highlight that the fusion of cultures may lead to identity conflicts or crises, where individuals grapple with questions of belonging and self-definition—an aspect defined as "localisation as a counter process to globalisation" by Berry (2008: 329). Additionally, hybridity can result in marginalisation, with certain individuals or communities feeling excluded as a consequence of cultural blending. As Coulmas explains clearly:

> On the individual level, identities have become a matter of negotiating and, as the need to do so arises, renegotiating your place, your purpose, and your presentation in everyday life. On the collective level, identities are fuzzy sets rather than clearly delineated groups. (2019: 142)

This statement recognises the nature of hybridity, encompassing both its positive and challenging dimensions. It calls for the need for a heightened comprehension and appreciation of cultural diversity and hybridity within an increasingly globalised arena, where the confluence of migration and globalisation significantly influences the configuration of diasporas. Examined through this analytical framework, the fluid and dynamic character of identity within diasporic communities is emphasised, acknowledging the perpetual processes of negotiation and transformation transpiring in what is conceptualised as the "Third Space". This articulation serves as an appeal to embrace the malleability inherent in cultural identities and to esteem the cultural richness emanating from the coalescence of diversity and hybridity.

In response to the imperative to embrace the fluidity inherent in cultural identities and appreciate the enrichment derived from diversity and hybridity, it is necessary to acknowledge the importance of modern communication technologies in both shaping and magnifying this paradigm. These technological advancements have not merely blurred national boundaries but have also engendered heightened interactions within diasporic communities. The process of globalisation, fostering the interconnectivity of the world, has become a conduit for extensive cultural exchange, instigating the formation of diasporic communities and facilitating the seamless diffusion of cultural practices across geographical borders. Globalisation, defined as the increasing interconnection of lives across distant regions economically, politically, and culturally, is central to this phenomenon. As succinctly expressed by Legrain in *Open world: The truth about globalisation*:

> Globalisation is a shorthand for how our lives are becoming increasingly intertwined with those of distant people and places around the world– economically, politically, and culturally. (2002: 4)

Furthermore, Legrain aptly explains, "globalisation is a process, not a destination" (2002: 9). This viewpoint aligns with the nature of identity and space in globalisation, urging a continuous examination of its evolving dynamics rather than perceiving it as an inert state. This global cultural interchange serves to significantly enhance the experiences of individuals within diasporas, aiming to cultivate the development of dynamic cultural identities. This transformation is stressed by a perceptible shift in the nature of the exile experience from one characterised by solitude to a collective and interconnected milieu. As emphasised by Knight: "the technologies that make global culture possible also facilitate the dissemination and hence revival of distinctive local cultures" (2000: 242). In other words, the same technologies that

connect the world on a global scale also serve as channels through which local cultures can be shared, preserved, and revitalised, suggesting that rather than eradicating local distinctiveness, global technologies contribute to the rejuvenation and sustained existence of diverse cultural identities at the local level. By extension, "the process of globalisation may lead to the fragmentation of extant societies into more culturally-specific nation states, rather than to larger more uniform cultural entities, that one of the consequences of intercultural contact, particularly when it is negative or discriminatory, is to react against it, and to increase one's identification with one's own cultural community" (Berry, 2008: 329). In the context of Berry's articulation, the conceptualisation of the "Third Space" emerges as a critical nexus for these communities, offering a platform for the negotiation of identities, the sustenance of connections with the homeland, and active engagement with the prevailing sociocultural milieu. Within this dynamic "Third Space", the convergence of time-honoured traditions with contemporary influences catalyses a continuous process of identity construction and reconstruction. It functions as an intellectual and cultural crucible wherein old traditions meet new influences, fostering a continuous process of identity construction, reconstruction and cultural expressions. The influence of contemporary communication technologies not only accentuates the fluidity inherent in cultural identities but also engenders a perpetually evolving and dynamic cultural landscape within diasporic communities.

In sum, these concepts provide a profound understanding and an in-depth analysis of cultural identity in the context of diaspora. Bhabha's exploration of "unhomeliness", the "Third Space", Legrain's "localisation/globalisation" duality and Berry's societal fragmentation through migration enrich the understanding of how diasporic communities negotiate their sense of self and cultural affiliations in a rapidly changing and interconnected world. These concepts often apply to fiction with a postmodernist approach and a personal revision of sociohistorical context. They go beyond ethnicity and embrace the cross-cultural dimension in hybridity. These concepts illustrate how individuals and communities negotiate their sense of belonging and cultural expression in a globalised world. These ideas, along with those of Hall and relevant scholars, emphasise the significance of recognising cultural hybridity, agency, and the evolving nature of cultural identity, enlightening the experiences and challenges faced by diasporic individuals and communities. They illuminate the significance of understanding the experiences of diasporic communities, who navigate between their heritage and the new cultural landscapes they encounter. It is a hybrid space and a liminality, where the boundaries

of self and other blur, creating a unique *own space* for the exploration and expression of identity.

3.3. Constructing identity in diaspora: Exploring cultural hybridity and its role in identity formation

In this section, I intend to present the conceptual framework that informs my understanding of identity transformation processes. As the transformative process of immigrant identity encompasses a multitude of dimensions, it is only relevant that this research follows a hybrid approach in favour of multidimensional frameworks, beginning with the cultural identity framework theorised by Stuart Hall. Much of Hall's initial work on cultural identity explored "the complexities of racialised and class identities in Caribbean societies" (Solomos, 2014: 1670) by correlating history with the contemporary setting. He articulated how geopolitical settings could influence race and class in particular ways and addressed "questions about the complexities of diasporic identities" (Solomos, 2014: 1670) in his later works. The reason for applying Hall's concepts became evident early in my research because, much like the migration trajectory of all my research participants from Malaysia to the United Kingdom, he was born and bred in Jamaica, and spent his early years there before migrating to England as an adult, where he spent the rest of his life. His own trajectory formed the basis for his research and advocacy which are all at once political, academic, and personal as he avows, "the heart has its reasons" (1990: 223). The way his works have been inspired by his own experience, "always 'in context'" from a specific history and culture, "*positioned*" (1990: 222) as a contiguous-insider (a term I use to describe my reflexive positionality *vis à vis* this research explained in 1.5.4), the same could be said, modestly, about my motivation, inspiration and "position" for this thesis research.

In my research, the concept of cultural identity is applied to explore how Malaysians identify themselves, initially in their homeland, and subsequently as immigrants in the United Kingdom. As discussed in Part 2, Malaysia is a multicultural country with a diverse mix of ethnic groups, including Malays, Chinese, Indians and mixed-ethnic groups. Each group maintains its unique religions, customs, and lifestyle. Despite these differences, there are shared cultural aspects that unite these groups. For example: English is the *lingua franca* for intercommunication; family is central to the social structure and there is an emphasis on unity, loyalty, and respect for the elderly; each major religious group has its religious celebrations declared as official holidays, and each ethnic group has its unique traditions and lifestyles. These cultural similarities and differences significantly shape the identity of Malaysians and their interactions with one another. This exploration extends to their individual and collective identities post-migration, highlighting both the similarities and differences that exist with other

cultural groups in the host country. These distinctions serve as significant catalysts in uniting people towards a shared objective—establishing a sense of belonging. Hall's work, which centres on the black Caribbean diaspora experience, discusses "the history of transportation, slavery, and migration, […] the rift of separation" and the "loss of identity". He suggests that cultural identities are "unstable points of identification or suture" (1990: 224). In a parallel vein, delving into the journey of cultural identity transformation elucidates the Malaysian populace. Given the multidimensional nature of their identity, which intertwines ethnicity and culture, I expand on Hall's cultural identity by incorporating the term 'ethno' as a suffix. This expansion culminates in the concept of ethnocultural identity, as expounded in detail in section 3.3.2. Their identity is in a constant state of deconstruction and reconstruction, "belonging as much to the future as it does to the past" (Hall, 1990: 225). This process necessitates an understanding of the historical context of colonialism, indentured labour, and migration. Given that identity is always evolving, "in process", and subject to ongoing negotiation, it can never be truly complete or stable (Grossberg in *Questions of Cultural Identity*, 1996), epitomising the situation of Malaysian immigrants in reference to their hybrid identity.

In other words, the stress is on multiple identities and differences as opposed to singular identities (Grossberg, 1996). With that in mind, Hall's framework is then combined with Bhabha's theory of hybridity as a space for "becoming", "ambivalence" and cultural "in-between" space (1994), complementing Hall's theory which challenges the narrative of Eurocentrism (European perspectives on identity that are bound within geography and ethnicity). Hybridity comes to exist in between current situations or spaces as a consequence of what is understood as "cultural globality", which Bhabha defines as "in-between spaces", "double-frames" and "the emergent provisionality of the 'present'" in *The Location of Culture* (1994: 216). He states:

> […] the temporal movement and passage that it allows, prevents identities at either end of it from settling into primordial polarities. This interstitial passage between fixed identifications opens up the possibility of a cultural hybridity that entertains difference without an assumed or imposed hierarchy. (*The Location of Culture*, 1994: 4)

Bhabha contends that identities have the ability to move within categories without being tied to one's past identity and history, diverging slightly from Hall's view of a past history and present/future experience identity combination. Thus, the concept of cultural hybridity could

be understood as encompassing more than one identity, and by extension, a form of fluidity that incorporates several elements to make up an individual's identity. Because of this fluidity, hybridity faces challenges and a "shifting boundary of otherness within identity" (Bhabha, 1994: 51), resulting in disconcerting identities. Following Coulmas:

> In postcolonial contexts, discussions about identity have a paradoxical flavour when, in the name of identity, imposed ethnic identities are rejected, as a remnant of the Western domination of the world. (2019: 25)

Indeed, the encounter lies at the border wherein the self meets the other, encapsulating the idea of globalisation, where local cultures and traditions interact with global influences, and the meeting of Eastern and Western cultures, which enables us to fully grasp the extent of these confrontations and the fragmentation caused by the eventual lack of communication and cultural differences (Smith & Leavy, 2008). The "ambivalence and cultural "in-between" space that are rooted in hybridity inform us of the adversity of living with differences. Put another way, the concept of hybridity provides a valuable lens for examining the intricate identities of Malaysian immigrants. This includes their pre-existing ethnocultural identities prior to emigration from Malaysia to the United Kingdom, and their post-migration experiences of cultural "in-between" space and "becoming" (as described by Hall and Bhabha) in the context of finding a sense of belonging in their new host country.

3.3.1. Identifying oneself/self-identification

Based on Coulmas's anthology of definitions of identity, identities afford individuals the capacity to adapt seamlessly to a myriad of "psychological, social, political, cultural, and many other contexts", employing them to articulate "personal values, […] designate attachments to ethnic groups, religious communities, or nations" (2019: 24). The conceptualisation of identity differs between literary criticism and law enforcement circles, with primordialists asserting inherent stability, constructivists viewing it as an ongoing developmental process, and interactionists integrating elements from both perspectives (Coulmas, 2019). The concept of identity, as understood today, originates from the ideologies of the French and American revolutions, emphasising the dignity and equality of the individual (Coulmas, 2019). Rooted in principles like one man, one vote, equality before the law, and human rights, the notion of identity initially focused on the self-sufficient individual with a distinct personal identity (Coulmas, 2019). This individualistic origin led to the transfer of the concept to "collectivities" defined by common characteristics, "both predetermined and adopted, that claimed a selfhood worth sustaining" (Coulmas 2019: 25).

The nature of identity constitutes an existential question that eludes a simple, singular response. The term identity is complex and versatile, with diverse meanings across scientific disciplines and everyday discourse. According to the OED, the etymology of the term has diverse linguistic origins, partially deriving from Middle French *identité* and post-classical Latin *identitas*. Middle French usage dates back to the 14th century, initially denoting the quality or condition of being the same. In post-classical Latin, the term emerged in the 4th century, representing the quality of sameness and later evolving to convey the idea of being oneself and not something else. Various European languages, including Catalan (*identitat*), Spanish (*identidad*), Portuguese (*identidade*), Italian (*identità*), and German (*Identität*), exhibit comparable terms derived from the Latin root. OED traces the semantic evolution of the term 'identity' over the centuries. From the 16th century, the OED underscores the notion of "absolute or essential sameness; oneness", indicating a foundational concept rooted in uniformity. emphasises the "absolute or essential sameness; oneness". By the 18th century, a shift occurred, encompassing "a set of characteristics or a description that distinguishes a person or thing from others". This reflects a transition from a focus on intrinsic sameness to an acknowledgment of distinguishing features. Notably, in the 19th century, the OED identifies a further development in the definition of identity, encompassing "[t]he condition of being identified in feeling, interest, etc.; identification with." This expansion highlights a broader and

more relational dimension, incorporating emotional and contextual aspects of identification. The inclusion of synonyms for identity in the OED, such as 'individuality', 'self', 'selfhood', 'personality', 'self-perspective', 'character', 'distinctiveness', 'differentiation', 'originality', 'uniqueness', 'singularity', and 'differentness', illustrates the richness and diversity of interpretations across various fields. These synonyms point to the polyvalent nature of identity, encompassing aspects ranging from personal characteristics to individual perspectives and unique qualities, demonstrating the comprehensive understanding of the term across diverse contexts.

In light of these definitions and synonyms, the concept of identity and culture becomes particularly relevant as it has become a focal point of debate, and even controversy, in recent years. Erikson terms identity as "unfathomable" and "all-pervasive" (*Identity: Youth and Crisis*, 1968), while Wieseltier views this concept as an illusion (*Against Identity*, 1996), just as Bayart regards cultural identity as equivocal and "imaginaire" (*L'Illusion identitaire,* 1996). Despite these volatile and dichotomous opinions, a common thread emerges: identity is ubiquitous, and it means "different things to different people and in different scientific disciplines" (Coulmas 2019: 24). In contributing to cultural studies and in reminding us that culture is essential, Hall's canonical essay entitled *Cultural identity and diaspora* (1990) offers two definitions of "cultural identity". First, he states that cultural identity considers the various and ever-changing social realities and as such, liberates anyone striving for freedom. This definition highlights similarities and commonality in history and heritage within a community, "one, shared culture, a sort of collective 'one true self'" (1990: 223). Since cultural identity is relational to culture and history, Hall's second definition of the concept of cultural identity, seeing it as "less familiar and more unsettling" (1990: 226) stresses "becoming" and "being" (1990: 225), a "'production', which is never complete, always in process" (1990: 222)— so it is not a fixed entity. That is to say, it is flexible, subjective, circumstantial and transformative. Identity transformation can be observed through shared history, culture and experiences, valuing the diverse elements that make up "'what we really are'; or rather - since history has intervened – 'what we have become'"—destabilising factors that impact the process (Hall, 1990: 225). In this alternative viewpoint, cultural identity exists as a continuous process of being and becoming, finding its significance both in the past and the future. This analytical exploration deepens the understanding of identity and culture, highlighting their fluidity, subjectivity, and transformative potential.

As previously established, the discourse surrounding identity is manifold and ongoing. In supplementing the exploration of identity's definitions and synonyms, the discussion initiates with the biological dimension of gender, categorising individuals as male, female, or non-binary. The 2021 World Health Organization (WHO) statistics report revealed gender-based barriers in healthcare access (WHO, 2021: 49), and the organisation and provision of health services can either hinder or facilitate access to information and support. Additionally, considerations may extend to race/ethnicity, influencing not only cultural heritage but also societal interactions and the delivery of healthcare services. Sexual orientation constitutes an additional dimension, indicative of an individual's romantic, emotional, and sexual predilections. Socioeconomic status serves as a reflection of an individual's financial and societal standing, exerting influence on access to opportunities, resources, and varied experiences. Citizenship, as denoted by nationality, configures legal privileges and cultural affiliations. Religious affiliation stands as another constituent of identity, intimately linked to one's beliefs and practices within a specific religious or belief system. Age, functioning as a chronological determinant, shapes experiences, responsibilities, and perspectives across different life stages. Physical or cognitive abilities, integral elements of identity, dictate how one engages with the surrounding world. Political beliefs encompass individual convictions, affiliations, and values pertinent to governmental and societal affairs. These self-identifications, or as During calls them, ""self-formation"" or Foucault, ""self-government"" (in During, 2010: 10), point to the unstable nature of identity, subject to continuous change and transformation influenced by personal development, experiences, and evolving circumstances. Specific facets of identity may undergo adaptation contingent upon contextual factors and the individuals with whom one interacts. Each facet uniquely contributes to the formation of an individual's identity and shapes their lived experiences.

My research aligns with the interconnected nature of identity and experiences, as participants' lived experiences are unequivocally tied to socio-historical, political, and cultural circumstances. This interrelation is particularly pronounced, differing significantly based on the unique ethnocultural backgrounds of individuals. These factors are contingent on their predicaments and aspirations, alongside political and cultural discourses that are available to them. Naturally, I am compelled to investigate ways in which participants' narratives disclose how they are "both structurally located and actively occupy a number of subject positions" (Lewis in Gunaratnam, 2003: 37) and how, for them, identity is a sum of several identifiable

elements, personal choices and associations. The concept of "role-identities" (Stryker and Burke, 2000) springs to mind:

> […] "role-identities" are defined in part by the social structure and in part by the individual, and when taken together they are said to represent the person (Turner, 1978). In addition, the self as a structure of role-identities is also said to operate as a social force, affecting the structure of society by affecting behavior in important ways (Rosenberg, 1981). (Callero, 1985).

Role-identities appear to operate via self-construction and interactions with others, generating interminable identity (trans)formation. This action can be perceived as emancipatory in shaping their participation in social interactions, fostering a sense of belonging, and facilitating identity transformation. It provides individuals with a sense of autonomy in defining their self-identifications and assuming various roles. For instance, an individual's role-identities might consist of being an artist, a wife, a daughter, and a volunteer. If I were to shift this concept and reframe it in the context of a Malaysian immigrant in the United Kingdom, using a participant excerpt as an example: *I'm a freelance journalist, a mother to a 5-year-old girl, a wife to a Canadian and a Tamil Malaysian*. What can be understood here is the multiple identity roles this participant occupies in her personal life and in society:

IDENTITY		
Socioeconomic status	Family	Ethnocultural/National
↓	↓	↓
Freelance journalist	Mother, wife	Tamil Malaysian

Not only has this participant (E32) provided meaning and definition for herself through specific and complementary roles, but she also lives in a myriad of cultures where her own Tamil and Malaysian cultures have been further infused with Canadian and British cultures—forming a hybrid cultural environment. It is noteworthy how E32, who lives in England calls herself a Tamil Malaysian, and not just Malaysian or British, which reflects her unique identification encompassing a strong connection to her Tamil and Malaysian roots, even as she navigates life in a predominantly British environment. It is a reminder of the richness and complexity of human identities in the increasingly globalised world. Needless to say, in order to understand this ethnocultural identity and hybridity, one needs to look at the identification of Malaysians,

first in Malaysia and then in the United Kingdom, which will be discussed in sections 3.3.2 and 3.3.3.

Much like role-identities, situational factors can shape identities, prompting individuals to highlight different facets of their identity based on the social context. It is understood that the way people view themselves in comparison to others in social situations shapes their social identities, which are "socially and interactionally mediated" (Brunsma & Delgado, 2008: 343). Luna Dolezal articulates in *Reconsidering the Look in Sartre's Being and Nothingness*:

> Being able to 'see' myself, and manifest the structures of consciousness which allow reflective self-awareness and self-judgement, occurs as a result of an encounter with the other. (2012: 14)

According to Dolezal, it is through the gaze of another person that one becomes conscious of oneself as an entity in the world, prompting reflection and self-examination. This interaction not only shapes the perception of the self but also influences how it constructs identities, highlighting the critical role of social encounters in the development of self-awareness and self-conception. In the same vein, Huntington (2004) suggests that an individual's identities can be influenced by situational factors. This implies that individuals may adapt their behaviour and communication strategies to align with diverse groups or contexts, accentuating specific facets of their identity as circumstances require. For example, the perceived significance of the interlocutor or the relevance of administrative documentation may influence the manner in which individuals present and construct their sense of self. Concurrently, individuals may prioritise and emphasise their professional identity in a workplace setting, their socio-religious identity within their faith community, and their personal identity during interactions with intimate family and friends. Conversely, the perceived significance of a conversation might compel individuals to deliberately suppress or reject certain aspects of their identity. In other words, individuals' self-presentation and perception in new settings begin with bodily interactions, exposing them to others' gaze, which can intentionally or subconsciously unveil or mask aspects of their identity (Dolezal, 2012). Situations, "the positions of enunciation" or "positionality" as Hall puts it, therefore, become a form of identity that is "never identical, never exactly in the same place" (1990: 222; 2019: 204 – see 3.2.4). For example, while a person might typically align themselves with a national identity, there could be specific scenarios or interactions with certain individuals or groups where their ethnocultural identity might take precedence. Taking a participant excerpt as an example: *I'm predominantly Chinese.*

So, if there's any forms to fill out, I would always write Chinese or mixed Asian to categorise myself in a very large ethnic group.

IDENTITY		
National	Ethnocultural	Situational/positional
↓	↓	↓
Malaysian	Chinese	Chinese/Asian

E22 exhibits a strong connection to her Chinese heritage, often prioritising her Chinese identity over other aspects. Indeed, the prevalent practice in Malaysia of identifying individuals based on their ethnic appearance, rather than solely recognising them as Malaysians, could influence how this participant perceives and categorises herself. This inclination is s further fuelled by a desire to belong to a larger "Chinese or mixed Asian" ethnic group, sometimes to the point of downplaying her national identity, which suggests a desire for a sense of belonging within a broader collective ethnocultural identity.

According to Cuninghame in his research on US-Mexican borders in *Hybridity, Transnationalism, and Identity in the US-Mexican borderlands*:

> [I]dentity was thought of as being primordial and embedded in territory, language, kinship and blood lines. Although the primordial conception of identity continues to be powerful both in popular imagination and among policy makers, ("You cannot be Mexican if you don't want to live in Mexico," "You cannot be from the USA unless you can speak English," etc.), the idea of identity as construct rather than a primordial given has become prevalent in the social sciences. (in Smith & Leavy, 2008: 16)

By this articulation, in the context of E22, it could be argued that her identity is not solely defined by her Chinese heritage or Malaysian nationality, but is a construct shaped by her personal experiences, societal norms, and her desire to belong to a larger ethnocultural group. This underscores the complexity and fluidity of identity in today's multicultural and globalised world, aligning with Coulmas's assertion on fluidity with regard to identity in the "material world" (2019: 142). This change in perspective confirms that identity is not a static concept, but rather a dynamic one that is shaped by various factors aforementioned, shifting from situation to situation. Situational identity enables individuals to adapt to different social contexts, but it can also lead to a fragmented self-perception and a sense of disconnection

between different aspects of one's identity (Huntington, 2004). This form of identity, which might be subconscious for some of the participants in my research, is moulded by their capacity to acclimate to various cultures, not only within their families but also among their peers. Despite an inclination to avoid drawing attention to themselves, participants occasionally choose to accentuate either their distinctiveness or conformity, thus introducing a paradoxical element that contradicts their claim of not experiencing an identity crisis.

Based on M. K. Gautam's research, *Indian Diaspora: Ethnicity and Diasporic Identity* (2013), the study explores the evolution of ethnicity and diasporic identity among the Indian diaspora, with a particular emphasis on the Netherlands and Germany. The European Indian diaspora reveals parallels in settlement patterns and the formation of diasporic identity. While cultural heritage acts as a unifying force, for the second and third generations raised in European environments, "India has become a land of imagination" (2013: 26). Their identity undergoes a hybrid process of incorporating parental cultural narratives and the reality of being born and raised in Europe, echoing Hall's concept of 'one's true self' and the ongoing process of 'being' and 'becoming' as well as Bhabha's hybrid identity, akin to the Malaysian diasporic lived experience. As established earlier, identity is a versatile concept that influences how individuals view themselves and their role in the world, shaped by various elements such as race, ethnicity, class, nationality, and religion, and is further influenced by social and historical contexts. Furthermore, situational and positional identity recognises that an individual's identity is not singular, denoting that a person can have a mosaic of identities that are all valid and significant. These aspects intersect to shape an individual's lived experiences and opportunities in society. Kimberlé Crenshaw's groundbreaking work on intersectionality in critical race theory offers a comprehensive framework that recognises the interconnections among various social identities, such as ethnicity, gender, socioeconomic status, sexual orientation, and more. This concept, known as intersectionality, emphasises the ramifications of individual identities and their relationship to systems of oppression and discrimination. Her influential work has deepened the understanding of how these intersecting identities can shape an individual's lived experience and opportunities, as well as how these elements contribute to systemic inequities. In line with Crenshaw's intersectionality theory, the narratives of the participants in my research elucidate the multiple dimensions of identity and intersectional considerations. These narratives highlight the variability of these elements from person to person and their potential to change over time, particularly post-migration. This dynamic process fosters self-discovery and self-expression, enabling individuals to explore and

articulate their unique identities within the context of their intersecting social identities. Thus, the lived experiences of the participants, reflected in their narratives, act as tangible examples of Crenshaw's theoretical framework, further emphasising the relevance and applicability of intersectionality in understanding individual social identities and lived experiences. By acknowledging that identity is illustrative and evolutionary rather than definitive, it recognises that context is never absent, and continually shapes the entity it surrounds.

3.3.2. Ethnic identity, cultural identity and ethnocultural identity

In order to gain a deeper understanding of the construction of identity based on the narratives and lived experiences of the participants in my research, it would be beneficial to scrutinise the specific social identities that are most salient for this research. Terms such as 'ethnic identity', 'cultural identity', and 'ethnocultural identity' will be explored in this section. I use these terms that are of paramount importance to my research and which punctuate social identities that are primordial for Malaysian identification, whether within the context of Malaysia or the United Kingdom. These identities are often shaped by a multitude of factors, including but not limited to, societal norms, cultural practices, and personal beliefs.

Definitions

The distinction between ethnic, cultural, and ethnocultural identities has been a focal point in sociological studies (Giddens & Suttons, 2021). These identities, each representing unique aspects of an individual's or group's identity, are pivotal in comprehending how individuals perceive themselves and interact within society. Giddens and Suttons in *Sociology* refer to ethnicity as "a source of identity whose basis lies in society and culture […] and is "a type of social identity" (2021: 290), making up a component of a person's identity that is derived from their affiliation with a specific ethnic group (Stewart & Goldfarb, 2007). This is grounded on shared attributes such as social customs, culture, language, religion, and a sense of belonging to a specific historical and geographical region. It is dynamic, not stable, and can fluctuate across different situations and contexts, influenced by societal and political factors. Ethnicity is not a trait inherited biologically but rather a socially and culturally constructed identity (Stewart & Goldfarb, 2007; Giddens & Suttons, 2021). Barth delineates it as "the social organisation of cultural difference" (in Cheu, 2020: 20). Individuals are born into ethnic groups, but their association with these groups is "imagined" and predominantly based on social and cultural factors.

> [E]thnic groups are 'imagined communities' whose existence depends on the self-identification of their members. [They] may see themselves as culturally distinct from other groups and are seen by them, in return, as different. [They] 'always co-exist with other ethnic groups' (Pilkington 2015: 73). (Giddens & Suttons, 2021: 292)

This articulation epitomises the socially constructed nature of ethnic identity, emphasising its dynamic and evolving character. It highlights the role of self-identification, mutual recognition,

and coexistence with other ethnic groups in shaping ethnic communities within a multicultural society, particularly in environments where individuals may incorporate aspects from various ethnic backgrounds or adapt their cultural practices over time.

Ethnic identity intertwines with the broader conceptualisation of cultural identity, which refers to the collective identity of a group or culture, as well as an individual's identity influenced by their association with a particular group or culture (Samovar & Porter, 1982; Casmir, 1984; Timmons, 2004). It is essential to note that cultural identity, closely related to but distinct from ethnic identity, encompasses shared customs, practices, and values transmitted across generations. This broader understanding involves the incorporation of habits, values, art, beliefs, and knowledge shared within a specific society. Cultural identity is integral to an individual's self-conception and self-perception and is linked to various factors such as nationality, ethnicity, religion, social class, generation, locality, or any social group with its distinct culture. Moreover, cultural identity is not solely an inherent characteristic but is developed through immersion in the values, beliefs, and practices of a particular culture, active identification as a member of that culture, and the establishment of relationships within the community (Adler, 1977). Essentially, it represents the way of life and cultural expressions of a society. Similar to ethnic identity, cultural identity is not biologically inherited; instead, it is socially acquired through processes like socialisation, education, and exposure to a specific cultural milieu. Furthermore, Erikson's (1950) conceptualisation portrays the development of identity as a process wherein the two identities, individual (personal) and group (social collective), converge into a unified entity. Erikson thus places cultural identity at the nucleus of the individual, deeply embedded within the core of their shared culture. This integrated understanding emphasises the dynamic and adaptive nature of cultural identity, capable of evolving over time in response to cultural shifts, globalisation, migration, and interactions with other cultures. It emphasises the continuous transformation of societies and highlights the interplay between individuals and their cultural contexts.

Ethnocultural identity is a more inclusive term that integrates ethnic and cultural affiliations, examining their interaction with societal structures and personal experiences. Derived from one's ethnic background, upbringing in a cultural context, and subsequent social mobility, identity involves engagement with ethnic or cultural reference groups and their positioning in relation to the broader society. At times, external attributions by others may influence individuals' daily experiences and identity narratives, even if unconsciously. Explored by scholars, ethnocultural identity is a construct with nuanced definitions and

measurements ranging from broad definitions to culturally-specific definitions (Phinney & Ong, 2007; Ponterotto & Park-Taylor, 2007). For some scholars, the use of the term later transitioned from ethnic identity to ethnocultural identity, depending on the research context (Phinney & Ong, 2007). This term emphasises cultural elements, including values, beliefs, practices, norms, and ways of knowing that shape individuals and groups across generations, indicating culture-bound aspects of self and group membership (Matsumoto & Juang, 2004). Scholarly journals typically focus on culture in terms of ancestry, ethnicity, race, nationality, and occasionally include considerations of gender, sexual orientation, class, (dis)ability, age, or geography, categorised as narrow or broad definitions of culture. These considerations may oversimplify or generalise when using unidimensional measures. Social qualities that define culture are better captured by multidimensional measures, as they provide a more comprehensive and meticulous understanding (Matsumoto & Juang, 2004).

Thus, ethnocultural identity is understood as transcending simplistic distinctions across historical, cultural, geographic, or sociopolitical dimensions, suggesting a comprehensive exploration beyond a single perspective (Phinney & Ong, 2007). Measures commonly require self-identification within a specific group, exploring concepts of belonging and interest in one's ethnic identity. Additional dimensions include positive views of the ethnic group, specific values and beliefs, group-specific behaviours, the importance of ethnicity, and distinctions between racial, ethnic and national identities. In a world characterised by mass migration and the blending of individuals over generations, identities are often hybrid, multiple, and fluid, as highlighted by scholars Hall and Bhabha. For immigrants and ethnic minorities, a crucial understanding lies in navigating engagement with both the culture of origin and the host culture, a process unique to each individual and subject to situational variations within social contexts.

The relevance of these terms: Why they matter

In research, particularly in disciplines such as sociology, anthropology, psychology, and even business and economics, understanding ethnic, cultural, and ethnocultural identities is vital for obtaining precise and meaningful results. The significance of these social identities in research lies in their influence on data interpretation. Individuals from diverse ethnocultural backgrounds may perceive and react to stimuli, questions, or situations in unique ways. For example, a research question related to mental health might elicit varied responses based on cultural norms and stigmas associated with mental health in different communities (Helm *et*

al., 2019). It is crucial for researchers to be aware of these ethnocultural subtleties to prevent biases and misinterpretations of data (Helm *et al*., 2019). Moreover, ethnic and cultural identities shape the social context within which individuals function, where values, traditions, and social norms are influenced by these markers, in turn affecting their decision-making processes. In consumer behaviour research, for instance, understanding these markers is essential for comprehending how consumers make choices, what they prioritise, and how they respond to marketing strategies (Helm *et al*., 2019). Neglecting to consider ethnocultural identity may result in research findings failing to capture the complexity of human behaviour and patterns.

Ethnocultural identity is also closely linked to issues of representation and power dynamics. In research, the underrepresentation of certain ethnocultural groups can lead to skewed results and reinforce existing inequalities (Zakiryanova & Redkina, 2020). By recognising and incorporating ethnocultural identity into research design and analysis, researchers can strive for more inclusive and equitable studies, ensuring that the voices and lived experiences of marginalised or underrepresented groups are heard and valued (Helm *et al*., 2019; Zakiryanova & Redkina, 2020; Giddens & Suttons, 2021). Furthermore, ethnocultural identity is crucial in sociocultural research as it fosters a deeper understanding of social phenomena, such as the research presented in this thesis. By examining historical, sociopolitical, and economic factors, researchers gain insights into how these elements shape ethnocultural identities. This comprehensive analysis is crucial in fields where historical events and ethnocultural identities are closely intertwined.

Jean-François Bayart's work, *The Illusion of Cultural Identity* (1996), advocates a reassessment of the term "culture" in the context of identity and social dynamics. He questions the continuation of the use of "culture", contending that the concept of cultural identity may impede the comprehension of cultural aspects in political and economic contexts. Bayart emphasises the progressive nature of identity, challenging static notions linked to 'culture' and asserting that individuals and communities possess sophisticated identities that go beyond rigid cultural classifications. Criticising this term for its generality, which leads to oversimplification and the merging of diverse groups, Bayart explores the intersection of tradition invention and globalisation.

> [F]rom one space or historical landscape (*terroir historique*) to another, the intersection of the processes of inventing tradition, which has been

> constitutive of the general movement of globalisation for more than a century, reminds us that there is no culture that is not created, and that this creation is usually recent. (1996: 59)

Echoing Hobsbawm's The Invention of Tradition (1983), which provides profound insight into how traditions are created and the impact of these invented traditions on society, Bayart further highlights that cultural creation is a recent development that has increased following "the general movement of globalisation". Probing whether 'culture' adequately captures these complexities and underscores the role of dialogue in cultural development, Bayart suggests that the assumption of cultural coherence in political communities may be misleading.

While his work delves into the repercussions of cultural concepts in political and economic spheres, he cautions against their manipulation for political purposes, such as perpetuating stereotypes or justifying discriminatory practices. Thus, Bayart urges scholars to participate in discussions concerning identity, diversity, and the influential forces of culture in contemporary society, as he argues:

> [C]ulturalism cannot help us, for it commits three methodological errors: it maintains that a culture is a corpus of representations that is stable over time; it sees this corpus as closed in on itself, and it assumes that this corpus determines a specific political orientation. The time has come to refute each of these assertations. (1996: 65)

The critique of culturalism can be articulated around several contentions. Firstly, Bayart's argument on culturalism often assuming a static view of culture seems to neglect the inherent dynamism and evolution of cultural practices in response to sociopolitical and economic shifts. This oversimplification fails to account for the intricate processes underpinning cultural transformations. Secondly, culturalism tends to view cultures as isolated constructs, disregarding the intercultural exchanges facilitated by phenomena such as cultural diffusion, migration, and globalisation. This perspective limits the comprehension of interactions and influences among diverse cultures. Thirdly, culturalism posits a deterministic relationship between culture and politics, implying that culture is the sole determinant of political orientations. In referencing Michel de Certeau's contemplation on the "oscillation of culture" between heritage and production, or between the "permanent" and the "invented", it seems, in my opinion, to overlook certain facets of what might be considered either permanent or invented (Bayart, 1996: 65). This perspective may not fully capture the complexity of cultural

dynamics, as it potentially neglects other elements that could be classified as either permanent or invented. This reductionist view fails to take into account the influences on political beliefs, including individual experiences, ethnicity, socioeconomic factors, and historical contexts.

While Bayart's argument provides a thought-provoking perspective on the constructed nature of cultural identities, it is important to consider that these identities often carry potent symbolic resources that make them highly effective in social mobilisation. That is to say, even if cultural identities are not fixed, they still play a significant role in social and political dynamics. Furthermore, the concept of culture, despite its complexities and potential for misuse, remains a valuable tool for understanding and interpreting human behaviour and societal patterns. The concept of culture provides a mechanism for the classification and examination of the shared beliefs, values, and practices of a group, thereby offering a structure for understanding sociocultural phenomena. As mentioned earlier, the use of ethnocultural identity is preferred for its more inclusive nature, as it acknowledges the complexity and dynamism inherent in ethnicity and culture, facilitating the analysis of its influence on both societal and individual behaviours. This approach highlights the importance of viewing ethnicity and culture as a fluid and versatile construct, rather than a static and monolithic entity.

Fundamentally, ethnocultural identity holds relevance in research by enhancing the quality and depth of investigations, fostering inclusivity and diversity, and facilitating a more nuanced and precise comprehension of aspects of human behaviour, beliefs, and experiences. Although Bayart's critical examination of the concept of culture points out its limitations and susceptibility to misuse, the outright rejection of the term may neglect its value in the realms of social and behavioural sciences. The issue is intricate, prompting ongoing debate among scholars and intellectuals. Researchers acknowledging the importance of such identities are better positioned to conduct meaningful and impactful studies, thereby contributing to the advancement of knowledge and the promotion of social and ethnocultural awareness.

The significance of ethnocultural identity in this research

For this thesis, I opted to use ethnocultural identity, specifically within the context of the Malaysian diaspora residing in the United Kingdom. This choice extends beyond the mere exploration of cultural identity by incorporating the dimension of ethnicity. The initial phase of the research focused on the ethnic identity of the Malaysian diaspora in the United Kingdom, given the prominence of ethnicity as a marker of identity and the importance of ethnic categorisation in Malaysia's diverse society. As the research progressed, the concept of cultural

identity, as articulated by cultural theorists such as Hall and Bhabha, grew increasingly compelling and appeared more suitable. Nevertheless, it failed to offer a sufficiently precise and inclusive interpretation. Thus, following Berry's suggestion regarding the use of the term ethnocultural identity (Berry, 2002), it became apparent to me that the sole use of the terms 'ethnic identity' and 'cultural identity' was too narrow and failed to encompass other life aspects of the participants in my research. To demonstrate my meaning, consider a Chinese individual of Christian faith who enjoys *Nasi Lemak* (a Malay dish) and fish and chips, and actively participates in the celebration of Malaysian Independence Day as well as Remembrance Day; or an Indian Muslim who wears a saree on special occasions, listens to Tamil songs, speaks Malay, English and Tamil. These examples illustrate the need for a broader term like 'ethnocultural identity' which, I argue, better encapsulates their hybrid experiences and fosters a more inclusive understanding of identity. By incorporating inclusivity, the research is able to delve into how these individuals reconcile their Malaysian heritage with British cultural norms, observe identity shifts across social contexts, and understand how diasporic experiences shape their self-identity. The choice of ethnocultural identity, given its significance within the diverse Malaysian identity, offers a fertile ground for exploring societal themes. This enhances the comprehension of the complexities of identity and migration, and the interaction between culture and ethnicity in individual experiences.

In sum, ethnic and cultural identities, while often inherited, are dynamic, flexible and socially constructed, and can evolve over time based on an individual's preferences. These identities, including ethnocultural identity, are interrelated and reflect how individuals see themselves and their group affiliations. Each emphasises different aspects of an individual's self-conception and group relationships. Ethnicity typically focuses on more 'permanent' traits such as shared heritage and ancestry as well as sociocultural qualities, while culture refers to more 'invented' traits such as society's broader lifestyle which is always in production. Ethnocultural identity, however, combines elements of both, providing a more comprehensive perspective on an individual's identity within their social and cultural context. These identities are socially constructed, dynamic, and adaptive as diasporic individuals navigate the complex sociocultural landscape. These topics are central to understanding multicultural societies and how individuals negotiate their sense of self.

3.3.3. Identity construction in Malaysia and in the United Kingdom

Identity, a socially and historically constructed concept, is shaped by various interactions and external factors. It is formed through social and cultural processes, including interactions with family, peers, organisations, institutions, and media. These interactions significantly influence how individuals understand and experience the world, contributing to the development of their beliefs, values, norms, and attitudes. This understanding of identity is particularly relevant when examining the historical culture and national identity of Malaysia. In the context of Malaysia, the analysis reveals a complex association between historical, cultural, and social factors. The historical backdrop of Malaysia, influenced by various civilisations and colonial powers, has given rise to a diverse and multifaceted cultural landscape. The elaborate web of interactions and influences has led to the formation of a national identity that is both unique and challenging to define. The impact of British colonialism on Malaysia is particularly evident in the ethnic divisions that persist to this day.

Malaysia

As discussed in Part 2, well before British colonialism, Malaya was made up of several regional Malay kingdoms, intersecting languages, religious beliefs and cultural practices. As such, the task of identifying a precise historical culture and defining a national identity in Malaysia is rather difficult, if not impossible. Furthermore, a continuous influx of immigrants from neighbouring countries and beyond, including Dutch, Portuguese, British, Chinese, and Indians, contributed to the introduction and integration of diverse languages and customs with the local population. This aspect has shaped Malaysia's cultural landscape and resulted in a plethora of ethnicities that persist to this day. The 'divide and rule' policy implemented during colonial times, coupled with ethnocentrically biased policies later on, has fostered a dichotomy between the majority ethnic group (Malays) and the minority ethnic groups (non-Malays). This remains a major hindrance to unifying the nation, producing a form of identity crisis for both the majority and, more specifically, the minority ethnic groups. This phenomenon certainly calls for a reflection on how one self-identifies as a Malaysian.

The need to address Malaysia as a unified nation, rather than as separate ethnic entities, has spurred various movements, notably a prominent social movement for an electoral reform known as *Bersih* (Coalition for Clean and Fair Elections) since 2005 (Khoo, *The Bersih Movement and Democratisation in Malaysia*, 2020), which has challenged the sociopolitical landscape in Malaysia. The formation of Malaysian identity is further complicated by, on the

one hand, issues of ethnic division discussed earlier, and on the other hand, the undeniable shared history and nationalism, "where the past continues to speak" (Hall, 226), and provides "some grounding in, some continuity with, the past" (Hall, 227). This perspective is enriched by a state of "cultural consciousness" where "the past was not to be forgotten, but to be built upon" (Kapur-Dromson, 2007: preface x), indicating a foundational approach to understanding and shaping national identity. Still, do a shared history, multicultural nation and sense of nationalism also share one common goal? While diversity is ubiquitous and there is some degree of freedom for cultural expression, the narrative of the binary us/them—Malay/non-Malay—is incessant. The binary perspective that delineates ""us" versus "them" or other forms of majority/minority relations", as Holst discusses, is intrinsically linked to the question of how nationalism and a sense of Malaysianness are cultivated amid such diversity (Holst 2012: 19). This perspective on the structural and circumstantial facets of ethnicisation, where "ethnicized identities" are employed to establish power dynamics in daily interactions, provides a lens through which to understand the formation of national identity (Holst 2012: 19). In an environment marked by diverse ethnic groups, the creation and reinforcement of these binary divisions contribute to the shaping of a collective national identity, raising questions about the inclusivity and representation of Malaysianness in a context where power and identity are interwoven (Holst 2012: 19).

The historical influence of the colonial period, with its Eurocentric vision of nation-building, has reinforced the dominance of the majority ethnic group (Malays) and their values, where Islam has become the dominant signifier of the nation. The intertwining of Islamic faith, Arabisation, and the special position of *Ketuanan Melayu* in the constitution (discussed in 2.2.2) has further solidified the identity of the majority ethnic group, potentially marginalising minority groups with different faiths and ethnicities. This phenomenon places the minority groups, who adhere to different faiths and ethnicities, into another category, and more importantly, they are seen as less representative of Malaysian identity. This begs a crucial question of whether someone with multiple cultural values, embodying a multicultural identity, can be considered as 'true' Malaysian. Concretely, could a Chinese-ethnic individual, born in Malaysia, of Christian faith and speaking Cantonese, English and Malay, be deemed less likely to possess a Malaysian identity as compared to a Malay-ethnic individual, born in Malaysia, believing in Islamic values and speaking Malay and English? From my perspective, what unites Malaysia is its unique Malaysian narrative which offers a more inclusive perspective that encompasses generations of diverse ethnicities and cultures—an ethnocultural identity by

means of hybridity. Acknowledging and embracing the diverse ethnicities and cultures that have shaped Malaysia over generations can contribute to a more holistic understanding of Malaysian identity.

In parallel, Ratnasingam in *National Identity: A Subset of Social Identity* postulates:

> [T]he formation of social identity is the impact of culture, particularly popular culture. A shared Asian identity is emerging within this region as a result of increasing communication and interaction among peoples from various Asian countries such as Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand, Korea, Japan, Hong Kong, China, Vietnam and Cambodia. (2010: 10)

An observation is made regarding the phenomenon wherein a "shared Asian identity" is taking shape within the Southeast Asian region. This intermingling between cultural and social elements emphasises the interconnectedness of diverse societies within the broader Asian context. As the discourse unfolds, it becomes evident that the evolving narrative of shared identity intertwines with the cultural mosaic, reflecting the historical, social, and communicative forces shaping the identity landscape of the region. However, the analysis also prompts consideration of the identity of Malaysians who have migrated, such as those residing in the United Kingdom. The cultural hybridity resulting from the interaction of Asian cultures and British influence, rooted in the legacy of colonialism, may lead to a further shift in identity for Malaysian immigrants abroad.

In conducting a thorough examination of the layers constituting the construct of identity, it becomes evident that its conceptualisation transcends the mere recognition of heterogeneous ethnicities and cultural influences specific to Malaysia. Identity, as a comprehensive phenomenon, spans a wider spectrum, encapsulating the profound human inclination towards forming connections with larger communal entities, particularly in the complex encounters faced by minority populations. Within this scholarly discourse, the quest for identity takes on the character of an odyssey. Individuals embark on this journey not solely for the purpose of unravelling the complexities of their roots and cultural lineage but also with the aspirational goal of attaining a sense of belonging within a more expansive societal matrix. This inclination is particularly pronounced in the experiences of minority groups, wherein the quest for identity extends beyond national boundaries. Drawing analogies, one may contemplate a comparable scenario involving the endeavour to integrate into a broader community, a circumstance frequently encountered by individuals from minority backgrounds, exemplified in places such

as the United Kingdom. In these instances, the dimensions of identity transcend the confines of cultural and ethnic parameters, evolving into social, political, and communal dynamics.

The navigation through the fabric of identity in such contexts necessitates a judicious equilibrium. Individuals are confronted with the task of embracing their distinct cultural heritage while concurrently seeking acceptance and integration within the expansive societal milieu. The thematic underpinning of yearning for connection and belonging assumes centrality, thereby accentuating the universality inherent in the human experience as it pertains to the pursuit of a comprehensive and inclusive identity. Consequently, this analysis expands to encompass the manifold nature of identity, duly recognising its pervasive influence amidst the complex cultural nuances and the broader human quest for communal and affiliative belongingness. This occurrence conspicuously foregrounds the challenges inherent in defining Malaysian identity, casting light on the potential biases that may pervade the discourse.

United Kingdom

Within the heterogeneity of identities in the United Kingdom, Malaysians contribute to the rich fabric of this multicultural nation. The presence of Malaysians in the United Kingdom epitomises a dynamic amalgamation of Asian and Western influences, thereby enhancing the overall cultural panorama. Malaysian immigrants introduce a distinctive fusion of traditions, languages, and a gastronomic array, augmenting the country's cultural diversity. This unique aspect prompts inquiries into the identity of Malaysian immigrants in the United Kingdom, shaped by the intersection of Asian cultures and British colonial heritage, as aforementioned. Upon resettling in the United Kingdom, Malaysian immigrants undergo a certain degree of transformation in their inherent ethnocultural identity. While they bring along their Malaysian roots and cultural amalgamation, they are exposed to a new and predominant cultural milieu in the United Kingdom. The processes of acculturation and adaptation to the British way of life generally induce a further shift in their identity. As they establish themselves and assimilate into British society, Malaysian immigrants frequently undergo a blending of their original ethnocultural identity with elements of British culture. This synthesis may give rise to the formation of a distinctive and evolving identity that incorporates facets of both their Malaysian heritage and their experiences in the new host country. It is crucial to recognise that the extent of identity transformation varies among individuals. Some opt to maintain a stronger connection to their Malaysian roots, while others fully embrace the British way of life, resulting in a more pronounced shift in identity. The migration process to the erstwhile coloniser's

country presents opportunities for personal development and cultural exchange. The trajectory of these immigrants unfolds as a process encompassing the retention of aspects of their original identity, adaptation to the host culture, and the cultivation of a new and unique identity shaped by their multicultural lived experiences.

Cultural identity in the United Kingdom is a manifestation of centuries of historical legacies, immigration, contemporary expressions, and global influences. The cultural landscape in the United Kingdom is marked by its heritage, which embraces Celtic, Roman, Anglo-Saxon, Norse, and Norman roots, and now incorporates various ethnic backgrounds (Colley, 1994; Darwin, 1991, 2009; McIntyre, 1998; Brown & Louis, 1999; Winks & Louis, 2001; Winder, 2005; Hyam, 2010). Additionally, with the British Empire's "ambiguous legacy", its far-reaching impact has left indelible imprints on the nation's identity, with traces of colonialism and the exchange of ideas, customs, belief systems, and traditions with former colonies, coexisting in a multicultural milieu (McIntyre, 1998: 131). In contemporary British society, cultural identity remains a dynamic and ever-changing phenomenon, reflecting the complex interaction between tradition and modernity (Bhambra, 2007). The significant immigration from Commonwealth nations, Europe, and various parts of the world has helped shape the modern-day diversity (McIntyre, 1998). This multicultural fusion has led to a mosaic of languages, cuisines, art, and religious practices coexisting across the country (McIntyre, 1998). Moreover, the nation's identity continues to evolve with the influence of global trends, technological advancements, and the ongoing process of globalisation. Colley premises:

> The sense of a common identity […] did not come into being […] because of an integration and homogenisation of disparate cultures. Instead, Britishness was superimposed over an array of internal differences in response to contact with the Other, and above all in response to conflict with the Other. (1994: 6)

The statement contends that it challenges the notion of a harmonious blending, asserting that Britishness emerged in response to interactions with the "Other" and, notably, through conflict with external forces. The term "superimposed" suggests an external imposition onto existing internal diversity, highlighting the role of external influences and conflicts in shaping the collective British identity. As the nation grapples with issues of inclusion, representation, and social cohesion, the celebration and understanding of its diverse cultural heritage are crucial in shaping a spirit of acceptance, inclusivity, union, and a harmonious society. Colley's statement

portrays British identity as a product of external encounters and internal struggles, emphasising the importance of acknowledging and embracing cultural diversity for societal unity and harmony.

In the contemporary context, the United Kingdom exhibits a considerable immigrant demographic and encapsulates the cultural diversity of British individuals emanating from diverse backgrounds, prominently characterised by individuals of South Asian, Continental European, African, and Caribbean lineage. The nation hosts a substantial and varied Asian diaspora originating from diverse regions of Asia, with the population being "larger than that in any other European country, and indeed of any other country in the world except Malaysia" (Brown, 2006: 2). Notably, according to a report by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, the Southeast Asia diaspora in the United Kingdom has witnessed a potential doubling in "size since 2001, with around 400,000 Southeast Asians now believed to be living here – around a third of them in the London area". According to Judith Brown in *Global South Asians: Introducing the Modern Diaspora* (2006), the Indian subcontinent experienced significant migration during the mid-20th century, with origins spanning Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka. The demographic data presented, sourced from the United Kingdom's 2001 and 2011 ONS Censuses, presents significant findings of the ethnic composition of the population over the decade. In 2001, the figures revealed a significant presence of individuals with Indian, Pakistani, and Bangladeshi descent, comprising 3.6% of the total population and representing a substantial portion, 45%, of the ethnic minority population. This data, as cited by Brown (2006), highlights the multicultural diversity within the United Kingdom. The subsequent 2011 Census demonstrates notable shifts, with increases in the number of individuals of Indian and Bangladeshi descent, whereas the Pakistani descent population witnessed a decrease. Such demographic changes are indicative of evolving migration patterns, socioeconomic factors and cultural dynamics:

> [F]rom unskilled labourers to highly qualified professionals, [involving] great diversity [of] different kinds of people in socio-economic terms moving at different times for different reasons; people of different religions, reflecting religious diversity […]; people of different regions and linguistic backgrounds; and latterly people from different nation states [creating] many transnational communities which sharing a sense of origin in that region of the world. (Brown, 2006: 3-4)

The influence of Asian communities on British culture is notably evident, especially within the educational milieu, where students of Asian descent consistently demonstrate remarkable academic achievements. Beyond mere personal accomplishment, academic success carries significant weight within the Asian diaspora, reflecting a deep-rooted cultural emphasis on the pursuit of high grades and intellectual excellence. This cultural perspective is firmly grounded in Confucian ideals, where academic accomplishment is not just an individual achievement but is perceived as a collective honour for the entire families of Chinese descent. In line with this observation, Dillon extends his view not only to the success of Chinese but also to Indian students' "personal commitment to hard work and/or their parents' ambition for their children['s]" future (2020: 661). Such academic success brings tangible rewards, including scholarships, admissions to prestigious educational institutions, and heightened prospects for future employment, as observed in studies by UNESCO (2013) and Chen and Bang (2020). This cultural ethos further strengthens students' conviction that their educational endeavours should serve as a pathway to transnational mobility, emphasising the broader implications of their academic pursuits. The recognition of the essential role of academic excellence in shaping employability endures among those enrolled in universities, accentuating the enduring influence of Asian values on their educational orientation, as evidenced in studies like those conducted by Selvaratnam (1988) and Chen and Bang (2020). Moreover, the heightened anxiety surrounding academic success is palpable, with Asian students strategically prioritising high exam scores for admissions to prestigious institutions, firmly believing that this approach will set the stage for enhanced future employment opportunities (Selvaratnam, 1988; Chen & Bang, 2020). The pursuit of academic excellence within these cultural contexts demands a substantial and persistent extra effort beyond regular school hours, reflecting the dedication and commitment instilled by the cultural values at play. This collective effort aligns with the broader vision articulated by Gordon Brown, the former British Chancellor of the Exchequer, in 2004. Brown emphasised that in the globalised world, the government's mission is to ensure that the populace is not only the most educated but also the most skilled and well-trained, identifying this as the singular path to societal success (Brown & Halsey, 2006). This alignment of cultural values with national aspirations emphasises the symbiosis between individual educational pursuits and broader societal goals.

Negotiating the complex terrain of British Asian identity involves individuals navigating between two cultures. In this dimension, the educational endeavours of Asian students not only reflect personal aspirations but also contribute to the broader societal fabric, shaping the

narrative of British Asian identity within the cultural mosaic of the United Kingdom. The contributions of the Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi, Chinese, and other ethnic communities to British society have been noteworthy. As explored earlier, the educational achievements of individuals from Indian and Chinese backgrounds are significantly shaped by strong parental guidance and aspirations. This is rooted in a cultural focus on scholastic accomplishment and prosperity. While the community of Asian descent is spread throughout the United Kingdom (5.5 million as per the ONS 2021 Census), it has a notable presence in London, enhancing the city's multicultural fabric (between 20.7% and 33%). These communities have enriched British society with their cultural diversity and have been instrumental in its socioeconomic growth, making contributions in fields like business, academia, and technology. Nonetheless, it is vital to recognise the considerable diversity in the experiences of individuals within these communities. While cultural and familial expectations are quintessential in shaping educational trajectories, individual circumstances, personal motivations, and external influences can lead to a diverse range of outcomes. The term "cultural superpower" denotes a nation whose cultural, artistic, or entertainment expressions resonate globally, command substantial international acclaim, or exert notable influence on a worldwide scale (Bratberg & Haugevik, 2011). Countries such as China, India, Italy, Spain, Japan, France, the United Kingdom, the United States, Jamaica, and South Korea are often attributed the label of cultural superpowers, though ongoing debates persist about the criteria for this designation (Bratberg & Haugevik, 2011). Unlike conventional measures of national power, the concept of a cultural superpower is tied to a nation's soft power capacities, highlighting its ability to influence and attract through cultural avenues. The United Kingdom, in particular, is frequently acknowledged as a cultural superpower due to its influential cultural identities (Bratberg & Haugevik, 2011). This affirmation strengthens the link between cultural identity, academic excellence, and a country's global impact, highlighting the United Kingdom's influential role in the world.

Malaysians in the United Kingdom

As constituents of the community, Malaysians residing in the United Kingdom serve as vital contributors to the augmentation of cultural interchange and the amplification of academic diversity within higher education establishments, thereby exerting a substantial impact on the broader societal milieu. Malaysian students, constituting one of the largest international student populations in the United Kingdom, play a significant role in the realm of cultural exchange through their academic intelligence and unique perspectives, notably enhancing educational pursuits in the United Kingdom (see 5.2.1). This collective involvement serves to enhance the

fabric of British universities, fostering an environment characterised by diverse academic disciplines and cultural nuances. In synergy, these individuals form a cohort that actively shapes and elevates both the scholarly and cultural dimensions inherent to the academic landscape of the United Kingdom. Beyond academic pursuits, Malaysians play an integral role in fostering cultural understanding and bridging connections between their homeland and their adopted country. Engaging in various cultural, social, and professional activities, the Malaysian community adds a unique flavour to the multicultural milieu of the United Kingdom. The experiences, challenges, and achievements of this community contribute to the broader narrative of the global Malaysian diaspora and its impact on the cultural aspects of both nations.

In parallel, gastronomic traditions also play a significant role in shaping cultural identity in the United Kingdom. British cuisine, profoundly influenced by its history and international influences, features a fusion of flavours from Indian curries to Caribbean jerk chicken and more. In various cities across the United Kingdom, Malaysian communities have established hubs, fostering a sense of belonging and promoting their cultural heritage through their cuisine. Various restaurants throughout the United Kingdom, particularly in London, offer an array of Malaysian cuisine where the country's signature dishes such as *Nasi Lemak*, *Satay*, and *Roti Canai* are showcased (5.2.1). Malaysian gastronomy serves not only as a taste of home for Malaysians, who are known to be passionate about food, but also to introduce their culture to curious food enthusiasts from diverse backgrounds. In addition to a gastronomic mélange, cultural events and festivals punctuate the British calendar, providing opportunities for people to come together and share their traditions, from the grand celebrations of Chinese New Year in London's Chinatown to the Notting Hill Carnival, these events create spaces for cultural exchange and mutual understanding. Malaysians in the United Kingdom actively participate in cultural events and festivals, celebrating occasions like *Hari Raya Aidilfitri*, Chinese New Year, and *Deepavali*, amongst other celebrations. These gatherings provide Malaysian immigrants with the chance to establish connections based on traditions, serving as a means to preserve their identity and cultivate a sense of belonging. Simultaneously, they facilitate the sharing and promotion of cultural exchange with the broader community.

Such endeavours are characteristic of diasporic communities. For example, Sales *et al*.'s research on the Chinese diaspora in London titled *London's Chinatown: diaspora, identity and belonging* (2011) discovered that the establishment of identity and a sense of belonging was closely tied to the presence of a "Chinese environment".

> [W]hat was important in making them feel a sense of being 'at home' was a 'Chinese environment' which could be found in London or in other places with large Chinese populations such as Hong Kong, Malaysia or Singapore as well as China itself. Thus 'home' and 'abroad' were not necessarily fixed geographical points as home could be recreated in different places. […] the actual manifestation of 'home' in London's Chinatown and its existence was essential to their feeling of belonging in London, a symbol of Chinese people and Chineseness which affirmed their identity. (2011: 226)

This analysis posits that the establishment of a sense of being "at home" and the cultivation of a sentiment of belonging among the Chinese diaspora in London diverge from a rigid association with a fixed geographic locus. Instead, these sentiments are tethered to the existence and symbolic connotations inherent in a "Chinese environment". London's Chinatown, as a paradigmatic illustration, serves as a poignant manifestation of this milieu, underlining its role in maintaining and shaping identity, belongingness, and the definition of 'home' for the aforementioned diasporic community. In the same breath, Siddiqui's exploration in *Institutionalising Diaspora Linkage: The Emigrant Bangladeshis in the UK and USA* (2004) delves into the strategies employed by the Bangladeshi diaspora to uphold their identity and foster a sense of belonging within host societies.

> The functions of […] associations include holding cultural programmes, celebration of Bengali New Year, Ekushey February, observance of national days, religious festivals. All these events provide an opportunity to Bangladeshis living in the locality to get together, meet people from home, enjoy Bangladeshi food and music. Occasional musical performances from renowned Bangladeshi or South Asian artistes, talent shows, beauty pageants are also organised by the associations. […] they organise sports events that are popular in Bangladesh. […] All these give a diffused sense of belonging to a larger entity, i.e., a set of people "from home" (Angell and Rahim, 1996) and contribute to the development of a bond of ethnic community. (2004: 33)

The analysis highlights how the collaborative endeavours of diaspora associations contribute to the cultural vitality, social cohesion, and shared identity of Bangladeshis, in the same manner as that of Malaysians in the United Kingdom, mirroring patterns often observed in diasporic

communities. The concerted efforts made by these individuals contribute not only to the preservation of their cultural heritage but also to the dynamic interaction with the host society.

The presence of Malaysians thriving in British society, contributing to shaping the country's cultural identity, mirrors Bhabha's conceptualisation of "mimicry" (*Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse*, 1984) and "culture's in between" (*Culture's In Between,* 2013). Bhabha builds upon the work of Mikhail Bakhtin, a Russian philosopher who developed the idea of "double-voiced and double-accented . . . but also double-languaged" as a way of describing how different voices and perspectives can coexist in a single utterance or text (Bakhtin in Bhabha, 2013). The Malaysian diaspora's engagement in the United Kingdom exemplifies a similar phenomenon in a broader societal context. Bhabha probes into the complexities of cultural identity and the hybrid nature of the self by applying this notion to the analysis of colonial and postcolonial literature and culture, arguing that they are characterised by hybridity, liminality, and the third space, where the dominant and the subaltern languages are constantly in dialogue and negotiation. Malaysians' ability to maintain their cultural heritage while integrating into British society signifies a harmonious coexistence of diverse backgrounds and identities, echoing Bakhtin's and Bhabha's notion of multiple voices and languages enriching a collective discourse. This notion recognises that individuals, especially those belonging to diasporic communities or multicultural environments, often embody multiple cultural influences and linguistic expressions. Aligning with Hall, this suggests that identities are not fixed but rather dynamic, shaped by the continuous interaction between different cultural contexts. The notion of "double-voiced" implies that individuals may adopt and express multiple perspectives or cultural narratives simultaneously. They may feel multiple senses of belonging—belonging to their cultural heritage as well as the culture of their current environment. This duality allows them to navigate between different worldviews, understanding and empathising with various cultural paradigms. Similarly, being "double-accented" within the context of the Malaysian diaspora in the United Kingdom highlights how individuals within this community may carry distinct linguistic accents, colloquialisms, and language patterns, reflecting their exposure to different languages and speech communities. This linguistic hybridity is often a product of their multicultural upbringing, migration experiences, or living in diverse linguistic environments. Within the Malaysian diaspora, the linguistic landscape is a myriad of languages and accents, serving as a rather unique marker of their identity.

For example, a Malaysian living in the United Kingdom may converse fluently in English, reflecting their proficiency in the dominant language of their host country. However, their speech may also bear traces of their Malaysian linguistic heritage, including a distinctive accent, unique idioms, or code-switching between languages during conversation. This linguistic 'double-accented'-*ness* represents not just a blend of linguistic influences but also serves as a living testament to the multicultural and multilingual upbringing of the Malaysian diaspora. Furthermore, the concept of 'double languages' can be extended to the Malaysian diaspora's ethnocultural identity. Malaysians in the United Kingdom often navigate between their Malaysian cultural roots and the British culture they are exposed to. This duality in cultural identity is akin to speaking two cultural languages—one rooted in their homeland and the other influenced by their experiences in the United Kingdom. This dual cultural identity is dynamic, constantly evolving, and shaped by ongoing interactions between the two cultural spheres. Being "double-accented" and having "double languages" find resonance within the Malaysian diaspora in the United Kingdom. Their linguistic and cultural hybridity is not a contradiction but rather a reflection of their diverse experiences and their ability to negotiate and integrate multiple cultural and linguistic influences. By accepting the "internal forms" of these dual or plural identities, Bhabha suggests that such coexistence of multiple cultural elements is not only possible but also enriching (Bakhtin in Bhabha, 2013). These diverse identities have the potential to complement and reinforce one another, giving rise to distinctive and multidimensional cultural expressions.

Building on the notion of linguistic and cultural hybridity within the Malaysian diaspora in the United Kingdom, I diverge to a broader exploration of ethnocultural identity. This shift invites a deeper analysis of how diaspora communities navigate the nuanced landscape of cultural assimilation and identity formation, especially from a British viewpoint, shedding light on their experiences and identities in a multicultural context. This analysis delves into the categorisation of Malaysians of Chinese or Indian ethnicity, who, in the eyes of British observers, might initially be associated with their ancestral lands of India and China, or as Asian British, much like how French or Belgian individuals are broadly identified as part of the European diaspora. However, this superficial grouping overlooks the distinct ethnocultural identities that Malaysian Chinese and Indian communities possess, which are significantly shaped by unique historical, linguistic, and societal influences distinct from those of their counterparts from the mainland or subcontinent. The ability to distinguish Chinese or Indian Malaysians from those from China or India itself—primarily through markers such as accent,

language colloquialisms, dialects, and lifestyle—signifies a deeper recognition of the subtle intricacies that define ethnic identity. Despite this recognition, the categorisation process inadvertently contributes to what I interpret as the *invisibility* of these individuals within the broader Chinese and Indian communities in Britain. In other words, the identity of a Chinese Malaysian is frequently misconstrued, leading to assumptions that they may originate from mainland China, Hong Kong, or even be part of the British Chinese community. Similarly, Indian Malaysians are often mistakenly identified as individuals from India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, or are categorised under the broad umbrella of British Indian or British Asian. As highlighted previously, this misidentification through the gaze of others reflects a broader tendency to oversimplify individuals' diverse backgrounds based on superficial ethnic markers, leading to a conceptual merger that obscures and conflates the unique cultural and historical nuances of Malaysian Chinese and Indians (Dolezal, 2012). This not only amalgamates their identities with those of their counterparts across Asia and within the British context but also fails to recognise the rich, nuanced heritage and experiences that define these distinct communities. Based on some of the participants' narratives, there seems to be a need to "proceed from invisibility towards visibility" within "its growing population in the United Kingdom" (Francis-Granger, 2023: 100), striving to distinguish themselves as Malaysians. Although they are *visible* as an ethnic minority, they seem to be *invisible* within the larger ethnic minority group. This calls for a deeper appreciation of the distinct identities and experiences within diaspora communities to foster a more inclusive and nuanced understanding of cultural diversity.

This ever-changing character of ethnocultural identity reflects the fluidity and adaptability of individuals in a globalised and interconnected world. It challenges the inclination to adhere to rigid definitions of identity and encourages the embrace of cultural diversity and hybridity. As observed within diasporic communities in the United Kingdom, understanding how individuals navigate their identities and sense of belonging becomes crucial in unravelling the complexities of cultural interactions in a contemporary, interconnected landscape. Within diasporic communities in the United Kingdom, where diverse identities complement and reinforce one another, shaping unique cultural expressions, a profound exploration of cultural hybridity and homeland loyalty emerges. As individuals traverse the dynamic terrain of their ethnocultural identity, the analysis deepens to consider the impact on their sense of belonging and connection to their adopted country. Simultaneously, they strive to maintain a *visible* presence as a community within the host land, while preserving ties with

their homeland. This dual focus highlights the complex interplay between assimilation and the desire to uphold a unique cultural identity within a multicultural setting. This nuanced exploration examines the delicate balance between embracing cultural diversity and the enduring ties that bind individuals to their roots, illuminating the dynamics of cultural hybridity and homeland loyalty within the context of diasporic experiences in the United Kingdom.

3.3.4. Cultural hybridity and homeland loyalty

Cultural hybridity and homeland loyalty are concepts that have prominence in the scholarly investigation of identity, ethnicity, culture, and nationalism. Understanding these phenomena requires a multidimensional approach, incorporating perspectives from various disciplines such as sociology, anthropology, and cultural studies. This section of the research will look into these concepts by drawing on the perspectives of distinguished theorists such as Stuart Hall, Homi Bhabha and K.J. Ratnam.

Cultural hybridity

Culture, as a foundational force in shaping individual identity, not only influences beliefs, values, and traditions but also provides a framework for understanding the world. As individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds converge, they contribute unique perspectives, enriching the mosaic of human identity. In the diaspora, where cultural significance intensifies, communities navigate a delicate balance between their birth and adopted countries, resulting in complex, multilayered identities. This dual influence prompts individuals to maintain strong ties to their homeland while adapting to their new environment. As such, identity formation in the diaspora involves a continuous negotiation between the past and the present, the homeland and the host land, and the individual and the collective. This process is shaped by the interaction of culture, heritage, and the quest for a sense of belonging. As individuals in the diaspora navigate these complex dynamics, they contribute to the ever-expanding blend of human identity, demonstrating the resilience and adaptability of culture in the face of change and diversity, both on the individual and collective levels. The concept of identity in the diasporic context is dynamic and evolving, reflecting the ongoing negotiation and adaptation required in the midst of cultural intersections, resonating with the words of Foucault: “Nothing is fundamental” (in During, 2010: 136).

Simultaneously, the concepts of cultural hybridity and homeland loyalty are central in the scholarly investigation of identity, ethnicity, culture, and nationalism. Bhabha’s distinguished standing as a postcolonial and cultural theorist significantly contributes to the comprehension of cultural hybridity. Cultural hybridity involves the blending of diverse cultural elements, creating new, hybrid cultural identities, “between fixed identifications” that “opens up the possibility of a cultural hybridity that entertains difference without an assumed or imposed hierarchy”, particularly in contexts of colonisation, migration and globalisation (Bhabha, 1994: 4). These new forms collectively constitute a counter-discourse aimed at

challenging the discursive dominance wielded by the hegemonic structures and institutions of colonisation. The primary narratives contested by this counter-discourse, in Bhabha's view, are essentialist national narratives concerning culture and belonging. The significance of these alternative narratives lies in their active negotiation of space, countering the tendency of hegemonic discourses to homogenise culture and society. This ongoing negotiation is characterised as a persistent effort "that seeks to authorize cultural hybridities that emerge in moments of historical transformation" (Bhabha, 1994: 2). This is in line with Van Der Veer on how "Bhabha emphasises the potential of migrants to reinvent themselves continuously in the postcolonial situation of cultural hybridity" (in Werbner & Modood, 2015: 95). From a scientific standpoint, the interconnection of different cultural elements is analysed through the lens of cultural evolution and adaptation, reflecting the transformative nature of human societies. Bhabha, like Hall, advocates for recognising the fluidity and instability of cultural identities, arguing that there is an essential instability to any bounded cultural space. This perspective challenges traditional notions of culture and identity and calls for a more inclusive and dynamic understanding, particularly in the context of migration. His theoretical framework emphasises the malleable and contingent nature of identity, aligning seamlessly with scientific perspectives on cultural evolution, which posit that cultures adapt in response to changing circumstances. He staunchly rejects essentialist notions, opting instead for a dynamic, context-dependent viewpoint that recognises the assimilation of new elements while preserving core features during the evolution of cultures. This multidimensional approach, drawing from sociology, anthropology, and cultural studies, enriches the exploration of cultural hybridity and homeland loyalty within the broader context of identity and ethnicity.

Central to Hall's cultural theory is the concept of cultural identity of "living with and through, not despite, difference; by hybridity" (1990: 235), a process wherein individuals establish connections across cultural groups. According to him, individuals not only identify with but actively choose elements from multiple cultures, resulting in a blended cultural identity. Importantly, this transformative process does not necessitate the abandonment of one's inherent culture. Rather, it involves the augmentation of one's cultural identity through the assimilation of diverse elements. Hall vehemently opposes the "essentialist notion of ethnicity", viewing it as detrimental due to its hindrance of the possibilities of "pluralisation" or "hybridisation" (Hall in Drew, 1999: 228). Instead, he advocates for the concept of "adjectival multiculturalism", encapsulating the fluid transition and intermingling among diverse cultures (Hall in Drew, 1999: 205). This approach leads to a fusion of cultural identities

that deviates from an "essentializing", uniform, or "originary" past (Hall in Drew, 1999: 226-7). From Hall's viewpoint, cultural identities are in a perpetual state of flux, continually influenced and shaped by interactions with other cultures. In contrast to essentialist views, Hall's perspective aligns with Coulmas's idea that aspects of identity are "product[s] of modernity" and rooted in "Western thinking".

> Aspects of identity that are relevant to our present understanding include the following. First, the social and psychological concerns with identity are a product of modernity. This implies, next, that the concept is anchored in Western thinking. There therefore has to be an admission of the changeability of identity, both of any particular identity and of the concept. As part of modernization and Westernization, it spread around the world, prompting reflection about what is in the object and what is in our disposition to categorize the world around us. In the West, admonitions to avoid essentialism are of relatively recent origin, and with regard to identity not always heeded. By contrast, it has long been a guiding principle of Buddhist thought that identity is in the mind and not in the world. In keeping with such non-essentialist views, identity has moved from absolute sameness to perceived similarity, common interest, shared gods, shared space, shared history, and shared lifestyle. (2019: 143-4)

Coulmas emphasises the global dissemination of identity concepts facilitated by modernisation, presenting a contrast between recent Western caution against essentialism and the enduring Buddhist perspective. He further traces the evolution of identity concepts from absolute "sameness" to more fluid, shared experiences, emphasising the "changeability of identity" and prompting reflection on the categorisation of identities on a global scale.

Hall emphasises the constructed nature of cultural identity in cultural studies, stressing its formation through discourses and representations. Discourses, media, and cultural representations shape identities, either validating or contesting established ones. Hall explores hybridity as the fusion of diverse cultural elements, particularly relevant in multicultural and postcolonial contexts, challenging notions of purity and authenticity. In globalised, multicultural societies, individuals often form hybrid cultural identities, challenging rigid ideas of identity. Bhabha's and Hall's concepts of cultural identity and hybridity are crucial for understanding the mosaic of identities, signifying both resistance and creativity. This is evident

in various creative expressions, where hybridity fosters new cultural forms, highlighting the complexity of identity formation and the adoption of multiple cultural elements. Both theorists' exploration of these concepts, relevant in multicultural and postcolonial contexts, challenges fixed ideas about cultural purity and authenticity and extends to ethnic identity as well. In the context of American culture, Weiner & Richards (2009) contribute valuable insights into the dynamic forces of ethnic identity, aligning with Bhabha's and Hall's approaches. Their research further reinforces the idea that ethnic identity, like cultural identity, is subject to processes of hybridisation, challenging static perceptions and acknowledging the synergy of influences shaping individual and collective identities.

> Ethnic groups who are marginalised from the mainstream of American culture are more likely to develop and maintain hybrid ethnic identities because this kind of exclusion reinforces the fact that they are different from majority group members. Due to this hostility that they face, these groups are likely to actively differentiate themselves from majority group members. (2009: 116)

They suggest that ethnic groups who are marginalised or excluded from the mainstream culture are more likely to develop and maintain hybrid ethnic identities. This is because the experience of exclusion reinforces their distinctiveness from members of the majority group. The hostility these marginalised ethnic groups face further compels them to actively differentiate themselves from the majority. This differentiation can manifest in various ways, such as maintaining traditional customs, speaking their native language, or celebrating unique cultural festivals. Their analysis reveals the connections between societal attitudes, cultural exclusion, and the shaping of ethnic identities, and how societal structures influence minority groups' identities and cultural practices. The study also highlights the resilience of these groups in maintaining unique identities amidst challenges and the ways in which they maintain primordial bonds to their homeland. Ultimately, this observation clarifies the process of identity formation among marginalised ethnic groups in the American context, resonating with implications for the Malaysian population in both Malaysia and the United Kingdom.

Homeland loyalty

Loyalty to one's homeland is a deep-seated emotion that is closely tied to one's identity, symbolising the emotional and cultural connections that individuals establish with their birthplace or ancestral land. This complex notion, firmly rooted in the fields of psychology and

sociology, forms the bedrock of how identities are constructed. A scientific investigation into homeland loyalty ventures into the domain of social psychology, decoding the cognitive and emotional mechanisms that fuel the bond with a particular geographical or cultural unit. K.J. Ratnam, a renowned scholar in Malaysian nationalism and ethnicity, offers valuable perspectives on homeland loyalty and its significance in shaping individual identity. He explores multiple identities within complex societies, addressing challenges posed by ethnic and religious differences to social cohesion. His analyses contribute to the understanding of the relationship between identity, nationalism, and loyalty to one's country of origin (see 2.2.2). His observation on identity is that it is "associated with citizenship [which encompasses] the state's claim to supremacy [and] the loyalty that is expected to accompany that identity, [navigating complex terrain influenced by] ethnic and religious sentiments (2019: preface). Furthermore, in his notable work he chooses to examine two concepts—identity and loyalty. Malaysians are known to have more than one identity and this increases with the complexity of the societies in which they live.

> [Primarily Malaysians are] members of the families into which [they] were born […] followed by the village or the tribal group to which [they] may belong. For the many people who continue to live in isolated communities, the question of identity […] would most probably end there. At the other extreme […] parts of the world, identity is perceived, expressed and defended at a variety of […] levels - some self-contained, others complementary and yet others competing or conflicting. We identify ourselves as belonging to large ethnic groups, trade unions, activist causes of various kinds, professionals, towns and cities or even to particular localities within them, states or provinces, countries, religions and ideologies, to name a few. At the basic level […] loyalty to one's parents, family or tribal group. [A]t an intermediate level, loyalty to ethnic groups and voluntary associations. [A]t the broadest level, loyalty to one's country or religion. The identity that is most strongly felt, and loyalty that accompanies it, could lie at any point along the continuum depending on a host of personal, political and other factors. […] Loyalty is universally regarded as a noble quality, […] a form of devotion or faithfulness. (Ratnam, 2019: 3-4)

In this passage, Ratnam critically examines the diverse nature of Malaysian identity, highlighting its complexity across different levels, from family and tribal affiliations to broader

associations with ethnicity, country, and religion. In alignment with Hall, Bhabha, and Coulmas, he emphasises the fluidity of identity, suggesting that its strength and associated loyalty depend on individual, political, and contextual factors. While recognising loyalty as a universally esteemed quality, the passage does not explicitly address potential conflicts arising from intersecting layers of identity, leaving room for further exploration of the emotional ties to one's homeland in shaping identities, which aligns with social identity theory.

Ratnam remarks:

> When we say that we are loyal to our country we do not have in mind its geographical boundaries or physical features such as rivers, mountains […] rather the national collectivity to which we belong, a collectivity that, because of its character, history and common destiny. […] evolved, evolving and voluntary […] loyalty to one's rulers […] can be brittle. (2019: 5)

By emphasising the collective history and destiny, Ratnam invites readers to consider a more profound and evolving connection to their country, one that is rooted in a shared narrative and aspirations. However, the caution about the fragility of loyalty towards rulers adds a layer of scepticism, prompting readers to critically assess the sustainability and resilience of their political allegiances. His analysis prompts a thoughtful reconsideration of the components and endurance of loyalty to one's country, transcending simplistic notions tied solely to physical borders. In addition to Ratnam's exploration of loyalty to the nation, Koh advances the hypothesis that Malaysian citizenship is strongly linked to national identity and loyalty, with "emotional meanings" rooted in personal experiences of "growing up", "familial social networks and similar values and characteristics shared by an imagined ethnonational community", rather than a direct association with the nation itself (2015: 538). This perspective aligns with a nuanced understanding that loyalty is not directly associated with the physical boundaries of the nation but rather with the emotional meanings derived from individual experiences and a sense of belonging within a particular community.

Furthermore, the juxtaposition of "localism and transnationalism" and the willingness to make sacrifices for the community and homeland, as illustrated by the "oscillation between loyalty and sceptical detachment characterizing the performance of diasporic lives" (Tölölyan in Cohen & Fischer, 2019: 29), reflects the complex dynamics individuals navigate in their allegiance to their homeland. The correlation between loyalty and detachment becomes particularly significant as individuals, including nationals, confront the challenges of living in

an increasingly heterogeneous and plural world (Tölölyan in Cohen & Fischer, 2019: 29). This aligns with the acknowledgment that "discursive construction of loyalty to the homeland" serves as a crucial "foundation of collective identity" (Quinsaat in Cohen & Fischer, 2019: 51). Together, these perspectives expound the nature of national identity and loyalty, shaped not only by historical and collective narratives but also by personal, familial, and transnational experiences. In the transnational diasporic experience, loyalty, or as I interpret alternatively, disloyalty, can also be established in the host country, particularly when the diaspora is quite significant. For example, take the Chinese community in London. Sales et *al.* argue that when the British-China governments engage with each other to strengthen political and economic ties through Chinatown organisations, it reshapes the relationships "between overseas Chinese populations, Chinatown and the 'homeland'", emphasising politics in "'diaspora practices'" (2011: 227). This has led to a heightened sense of pride in China's "rising power" status among many, which is perceived as elevating their position in Britain (Sales *et al.*, 2011: 227). However, this shift could also threaten Chinatown's cohesive identity. Generally, a broad, inclusive notion of 'home' allows for a shared identity among Chinese individuals, regardless of their birthplace or stance towards the Chinese state. With the exception of when 'home' signifies "attachment and loyalty" to the PRC's political regime, it risks driving a wedge within the community, sidelining those unwilling or unable to conform to this loyalty (Sales *et al.*, 2011: 227).

The inclusion of these additional viewpoints enriches the discourse on the complexities surrounding identity, and the binary loyalty—and, in my perception, disloyalty—is not only observed in the Chinese context but also in the Malaysian context. Malaysians who cling to their national identity might align with their homeland country's ideals and politics, even when these politics are rooted in ethnic-based frameworks (such as *Ketuanan Melayu* and ethnic-based quota systems). Conversely, I argue that those who reject such discriminatory policies might detach themselves from these national allegiances, viewing themselves as disloyal to their nation-state, and may seek solidarity with communities that embrace a more inclusive form of nationalism, be it ethnic, religious, or civic. My argument supports Ratnam's observation that although identity appears to be "associated with citizenship", "the state's claim to supremacy", and "the loyalty that is expected to go with that identity", including "ethnic and religious sentiments" (2019: preface), homeland loyalty can be influenced by a diverse array of factors that can significantly impact, as I term it, the *home-host-diasporic relationship*.

In examining the nuances of identity and loyalty, Ratnam's work becomes particularly insightful when applied to the experiences of the Malaysian diaspora in the United Kingdom, unveiling the challenges of balancing homeland allegiance with the adoption of hybrid cultural identities. This issue is central to diasporic communities worldwide, which navigate the complexities of maintaining their ethnocultural heritage amidst new cultural landscapes. Ratnam's analysis, enriched by the inclusion of multiple identities within complex societies, gives prominence to the practical significance of preserving heritage in the face of global mobility and cultural diversity. The Malaysian diaspora in the United Kingdom epitomises the unfathomable negotiation between political loyalty and cultural belonging, embodying Ratnam's theoretical discourse in their everyday lived experiences. The scholarship of Bhabha, Hall and Ratnam collectively examines the idiosyncrasies of identity formation against the backdrop of migration, globalisation, cultural diversity and homeland loyalty. Incorporating the notion of an "enigmatic sense of loyalty towards their homeland" further enriches this discourse (Francis-Granger, 2023: 100). This perspective suggests that identity, cultural hybridity, and homeland loyalty are not only intertwined but also imbued with a sense of ambiguity and depth that defies simplistic interpretations. This enigmatic loyalty can be seen as an integral part of the fluid and polygonal nature of cultural identity, adding another layer of complexity to one's understanding of these concepts. Thus, these combined perspectives provide a more nuanced and comprehensive framework for exploring and appreciating the multifaceted nature of cultural identity and loyalty. Through the lens of the Malaysian diaspora, their theories illuminate how individuals maintain connections to their origins while embracing new cultural elements, contributing to the socioeconomic and cultural richness of host societies such as Malaysia and the United Kingdom. This exploration into such elements not only enriches the academic discourse but also offers practical insights for addressing the realities of diasporic life in a globalised world.

3.4. Summary of theoretical approaches

In this part, I demonstrated a multitude of viewpoints on identity by incorporating diverse conceptual frameworks from distinct scholarly fields to decipher the process of identity transformation and sense of belonging. Analytical approaches to migration, ethnocultural identity, and hybridity encompass a range of theoretical frameworks and methodologies used by scholars and researchers to understand the complexities of these topics. These approaches provide insights into how migration influences ethnocultural identity formation and how hybrid identities emerge in diverse sociocultural contexts. Theories by Hall, Bhabha, Ratnam, Coulmas, and others explore the intricate relationship between identity, cultural hybridity, and loyalty to homeland in diasporic communities. I examined Malaysian immigrants' ethnocultural identity formation mainly through the lens of Hall's cultural identity and diaspora framework, Bhabha's concepts of hybridity and Third Space, and Ratnam's political identity and loyalty to homeland.

Hall's definition of cultural identity "living with and through, not despite, difference; by hybridity" (1990: 235), accentuates the term "living" in this definition which highlights the significance of paying attention to experiences, particularly those associated with migration, settlement, and the development of a sense of belonging, as observed in the context of relatively recent immigrants from Malaysia. This viewpoint facilitates a more dynamic and elaborate comprehension of ethnocultural identity. His focus on "difference and rupture" mirrors the experience of migration—such as forced migration in the case of African slaves and displacement in other circumstances. He cautioned that the commonality of history that brought Caribbean people together in diaspora is what needs to be continuously unearthed, presenting potentialities of one's future self. Hall underscored that "'[h]idden histories' have played a critical role in the emergence of many of the most important social movements of our time - feminist, anti-colonial and anti-racist (1990: 224). Therefore, underpinning the concept of living with and through difference, is the concept of hybridity, serving as a strategy for survival, transformation, reinterpretations, and re-imaginations, among numerous other opportunities of "becoming." In the context of Malaysians in the United Kingdom, this perspective can be applied to understand their experiences of migration, settlement, and cultural adaptation. The concept of hybridity becomes a "survival strategy", allowing for transformation and reinterpretations of their identities in a new cultural environment, as Bhabha articulates "[c]ulture as a strategy of survival" (in During, 2010: 191). Indeed, the term "survival strategy" encapsulates how human communities rely on adaptability, strategic resources, and risk

management to navigate socioeconomic, environmental, and other pertinent challenges in the globalised era, all while tailoring their approaches to the specific needs, goals, and contexts of the challenges they face (Gunaratnam, 2003; White *et al*., 2015; Koh, 2017). The continuous process of "becoming" reflects cultural identity that is shaped by both the historical experiences and the present circumstances of the Malaysian diaspora.

For this thesis, the researched participants' lived experiences have been effectively characterised through the lens of Bhabha's theories of hybridity, Third Space, in-betweenness and unhomeliness. These theories provide a framework for understanding the complex identities and experiences of individuals who exist within multiple cultural contexts. His proposition of hybridity denotes the creation of new cultural forms through the blending of different cultures. In understanding the experiences of diasporic communities navigating between different cultural spaces, hybridity is particularly relevant as it acknowledges the dynamic and transformative nature of their identities. Bhabha's concept of the Third Space is a crucial element in his work, symbolising an arena where cultural disparities are negotiated and reconciled, leading to the emergence of new identities. This idea challenges the binary perception of identity and culture, suggesting instead that identities are in a state of constant flux and evolution. This leads to the notion of in-betweenness, which represents the condition of being situated in an intermediate, middle space or being unhomed. In the context of this thesis, the unfixed nature of the participants' experiences, which encapsulate living between two or more cultural realities, captures the ambiguity, complexity, and richness of these experiences. By applying these theories, this thesis aims to provide a nuanced and in-depth understanding of the participants' lived experiences, highlighting the complexities of their identities, and their sense of belonging or unbelonging, which challenges traditional, simplistic views of culture and identity. The use of Bhabha's theories thus adds depth and richness to the analysis and provides a robust theoretical foundation for the study.

Ratnam's significant contributions to the understanding of identity, nationhood, and loyalty in the experiential, everyday-defined social reality of Malaysians address the issue of multiple or multilayered personal identity and loyalty as a self-defined entity. In examining the experiences of Malaysians in the United Kingdom, Ratnam's concepts provide a nuanced understanding of how they manage to navigate between their Malaysian heritage and their life in their current residence. I find Ratnam's concept of loyalty to homeland particularly relevant here, in that it can help explore how these individuals negotiate their loyalty between their country of origin (Malaysia) and their country of residence (the United Kingdom). This

negotiation process can be rather complex, involving aspects such as ethnocultural identity, social integration, and personal experiences. Moreover, his work sheds light on how people in this diasporic community maintain their connection to their homeland while also integrating into the host society, providing insights into how they reconcile their multiple identities and loyalties in their everyday lives. This includes aspects such as maintaining cultural practices, participating in community activities, and staying connected with family and friends not only in Malaysia but also in the host country. Thus, Ratnam's exploration of homeland loyalty, shaped by diverse factors, provides a crucial theoretical framework for analysing the *home-host-diasporic relationship* experiences of Malaysians in the United Kingdom. It enables a more heterogeneous comprehension of how they negotiate their identities, adapt culturally, and cultivate a sense of belonging in a foreign setting.

Considering the convoluted nature of interpreting ethnocultural identity, I reviewed and integrated other relevant concepts and notions of identification and sense of belonging supplemented by related theoretical perspectives. Some of these include Appadurai's 'ethnoscapes' to analyse migration, globalisation, and modernity, Grossberg on multiple identities, Ashcroft *et al*. on the subtleties of diaspora and colonialism, and Bayart on the illusion of cultural identity, among others. The combination of these scholarly theories and perspectives lays the groundwork for a better understanding through the exploration of this diaspora. Furthermore, terms such as 'cultural', 'ethnocultural', and 'diasporic' identity are often used interchangeably in this thesis to situate the participants' hybrid identity. Similarly, terms like 'integration', 'assimilation', 'citizenship', and 'sense of belonging' hold different meanings based on their context and usage. These terms can be interpreted differently by the state and the community. The discourse on diaspora provides a framework for understanding the collective experiences of communities living in transnational settings. Theories of migration, encompassing both forced and voluntary movements, should be understood within the context of evolving global conditions.

What is more, this part has discussed integration, identity, and diaspora, considering a de-territorialised form of collective identity that coexists with the concept and mechanisms of existing nation-states. It emphasises the need to study Malaysian diaspora history and Malaysian identity concurrently. The focus on personal narratives and lived experiences of this diaspora makes the research more specific and relevant to the discussion of integration, assimilation, and sense of belonging in the United Kingdom. The formation of the Malaysian diaspora and their integration experiences are seen as interconnected aspects. This diasporic

community in British society is diverse, with identities ranging from formal (such as Malaysian or British) to informal (such as Chinese Malaysian or British Malaysian). For some, their previous formal identity becomes 'former', and 'original' identity often refers to a post-migration informal identification, while some hold British passports, signifying a newly acquired formal and officialised identity. For, as Coulmas (2019) postulates:

> The paradox of identity, then, is that it is not what it professes to be, true to itself. Or perhaps it is, like a chameleon, displaying different colours at different times, depending on the environment. (2019: 142)

The paradoxical perspective on identity presented by Coulmas is somewhat counter-intuitive, as identities are often considered a core part of who one is. Instead, much like a chameleon that changes its colours based on its surroundings, he suggests that identity is not a fixed entity and not always "true to itself", aligning with the contemporary discourse on identity. His proposition suggests that identities are shaped by one's interaction with the world and evolve over time through growth and new experiences. Although it may appear that his assertion conflicts with Hall's notion of "one true self" (1990: 223), I view these two perspectives as mutually reinforcing and complementary. Specifically, identity encompasses both inherent and primordial aspects, such as ethnicity, and transient elements, such as culture and socioeconomic status, creating a hybrid identity. It is for this reason that I adopt the term 'ethnocultural' identity to underscore the relevance of the social constructionist framework in this study of Malaysian identity.

The importance of social networks has also been discussed in this part, noting that diasporic communities maintain strong links with their countries of origin, often because their families still reside there. They face challenges in Britain as they strive to regain their voice and achieve a reasonable level of socioeconomic status. The aspiration to belong in British society among the first-generation Malaysian immigrants seems to be a significant goal. By examining the reciprocity of ethnicity and culture, the research elucidates the vigour of diaspora and how individuals negotiate their identities in multicultural settings. As Coulmas explains,

> On the individual level, identities have become a matter of negotiating and, as the need to do so arises, renegotiating your place, your purpose, and your presentation in everyday life. On the collective level, identities are fuzzy sets rather than clearly delineated groups. (2019: 142)

His observations on personal identities hold true regarding the shaping of personal experiences, interactions, and the roles one plays in different contexts. Collective identities, such as those based on nationality, ethnicity, or other social categories, are not rigidly defined but rather flexible and capable of overlapping, acknowledging the "fuzzy" nature of identity within any collective group. Understanding these factors is crucial for comprehending the experiences, challenges, and opportunities faced by individuals in diasporic communities as they navigate their (ethno)cultural identities and sense of belonging in their newfound residence, giving prominence to the ongoing process of identity formation and the influence of both individual experiences and collective affiliations on this process. In the globalised world, according to Hirsch, "[i]dentities are not becoming less important", "they are becoming more important than ever" (2018: 318). This leads to the conclusion that "a definitive definition" of how identity can be described remains unavailable (Coulmas, 2019: 144).

PART 4

MIGRATION FROM MALAYSIA TO THE UNITED KINGDOM

4.1. Introduction to part 4

Migration is a phenomenon as old as humanity, yet each journey is uniquely influenced by a blend of personal aspirations, historical ties, and evolving sociopolitical landscapes. The migration corridor from Malaysia to the United Kingdom stands as a poignant exemplar of such journeys, woven with narratives of ambition, heritage, and the quest for a new life in a foreign land. This calls for an in-depth exploration of Malaysian migration to the United Kingdom, a movement marked by its history, diverse motivations, and the profound experiences of those who embark on this life-altering path. The bonds between Malaysia and the United Kingdom have been shaped by colonial legacies, educational exchanges, and mutual professional endeavours, establishing a foundation that has influenced migration trends for decades. These historical connections provide a backdrop against which the personal stories of Malaysian immigrants unfold, stories that are as varied as the individuals themselves. From the pursuit of higher education in British institutions to the search for career advancements and the desire for family reunification or an alternative lifestyle, the reasons behind migration are as diverse as they are personal. This part thus delves into the migration journey from Malaysia to the United Kingdom, providing an in-depth analysis of historical connections, individual aspirations, and current sociopolitical dynamics that shape the migration experience. It provides an overview of their lives prior to migration as well as their emigration experiences, focusing on how their life was in Malaysia in terms of family, school, friends, and other important experiences, and the circumstances preceding their emigration. It then aims to dissect the nuances of ethnocultural identity negotiation, adjustment to new surroundings, and the development of a sense of belonging in a distant land. By focusing on the narratives of Malaysian immigrants, the study offers insights into the diverse aspects of migration, emphasising the challenges, achievements, and the ways these immigrants are influenced by, integrate into, and in turn influence British society.

To contextualise and gain a deeper understanding of their lived experiences, an introduction to the participants is indispensable as it provides knowledge about their migration journey via pre-migration lived experiences in Malaysia. The examination thus begins with an introduction to the participants, whose stories are central to understanding the migration dynamics. The information gathered provides basic elements about the average number of years immigrants lived in Malaysia before leaving for the United Kingdom, as well as their immigration status, the number of years they have lived there, the education they pursued in the United Kingdom (where applicable) and their professional path in the United Kingdom.

This sets the groundwork for a comprehensive analysis of the factors driving migration, including historical ties, personal goals, and the prevailing sociopolitical context. The analysis also scrutinises the United Kingdom's role as a host country, looking at how language, immigration policies, and the sociocultural setting affect the integration and life paths of Malaysian immigrants. Employing personal accounts from 93 participants, the study paints a vivid portrait of their experiences, the joys, obstacles, and transformative nature of their migration journey. This narrative approach, set within a broader societal and historical framework, aims to offer a layered perspective on Malaysian migration to the host country, contributing to the academic discussion on migration, identity, and belonging. By bridging academic research with the lived experiences of immigrants, this analysis not only enriches several fields of study but also explores the human dimensions of establishing a new existence in a foreign land, providing a narrative that is scholarly yet profoundly resonant with the intrinsic human condition.

4.2. Presentation of the participants (the narrators)

In this study, a substantial majority of the 93 participants, whom I interviewed, originate from Malaysia, having spent their formative years and completed their secondary education there prior to their relocation to the United Kingdom. Their ages span from 18 to 70, reflecting a broad spectrum of life stages and experiences. A minority of participants follow unique migratory paths; some were born in the United Kingdom and moved to Malaysia, or vice versa, during their childhood or adolescent years, illustrating diverse mobility patterns. The table of participants' profiles in Appendix 3 provides an outline of the participants organised according to the chronological order of the interviews. As explained in section 1.5.2, I set up an anonymised sequential code system for each participant to protect their identity. The ensuing narrative sections present the participants' testimonies, generally aligned with the chronological order of their interviews, reflecting their memory processes. These narrative excerpts tend to differ in length as they hinge on how comfortable the participants were with sharing their memories with me. In Parts 4 and 5, the excerpts have been judiciously modified to ensure conciseness and relevance while prioritising the protection of personal data. These slight modifications were carefully executed to eliminate any identifiable information, thereby preventing any potential linkage to the participants' identities. The alterations were made with a dual purpose: to maintain narrative coherence and to protect the confidentiality of the participants' profiles.

At the outset of the interviews, which took place between 2020 and 2023, I requested basic background information from the participants, including their name, age, family background, residence in the United Kingdom, their migration timeline, and their professional engagements in Malaysia and the United Kingdom. This initial dialogue aimed to foster a congenial and trusting atmosphere between the interviewees and me, as the interviewer/researcher, rather than immediately diving into questions that could potentially intimidate them, or make them uncomfortable or insecure, thus resulting in perhaps a short and unsuccessful session. This type of setting has been known to yield a foundation for more profound discussions subsequently. This approach was intended to establish rapport, ensuring that the interviewees felt comfortable and respected, thereby enhancing the quality and depth of the dialogue.

While some participants provided succinct and structured responses during the course of the interview, most of them took the time to share their childhood/young adult memories of life

in Malaysia that they believed were defining moments for them and thus noteworthy. The ease of recounting these memories varied among participants, with some requiring gentle prompts to facilitate recollection. I remained acutely mindful of their comfort levels, avoiding any pressure to divulge information that might induce discomfort. In this process, I was a listener first, cognisant that the narratives shared were mere fragments of their broader life stories, echoing Zapata-Barrero and Yalaz's perspective on the nuanced aspects of qualitative interviews.

> [W]hile the qualitative approach may not produce perfect, mirror-like representations of the phenomena it investigates, its practitioners are by no means abandoning the standards of scholarly practice. Rather, they are intellectually comfortable with their commitment to achieving the greatest possible measure of verisimilitude or the closest achievable approximation of their objects of study […]. Well executed qualitative studies, in our case of issues related to international migration, which achieve a high measure of verisimilitude generate rich, multi-layered, and nuanced accounts of the ways in which various aspects of the everyday immigrant experience evolve and unfold. (2018: 115)

For qualitative researchers such as myself, this is a reminder that lived experience narratives have limitations since there is no means of becoming truly acquainted with the innermost self of a person. Only through interactions with the participants during the interviews can researchers collect narratives based on what participants decide to share with us. Participants may have their own reasons for consenting to be interviewed and may set limits on the information they disclose. However, sharing their life stories seemed vital for many participants who wished to be better represented in a certain way in order to reach their migration aspirations and success. With the aid of embedded questions and a semi-structured, conversation-like interview setting, this approach proved to be very helpful as it provided an avenue for participants to express themselves freely.

Calling to mind my reflexive positionality for this research project, my experience as a Malaysian immigrant living in France has motivated my interest in this research, particularly exploring other immigrants' personal paths, notably those living in the United Kingdom. This falls in line with Zapata-Barrero and Yalaz's observation that the fact that there is an "increasing number of ethnographers with an immigrant background, or with the same ethnic

background as their counterparts, is a desirable development in itself" (2018: 217). In keeping with the premises of an interpretative phenomenological methodology, encouraging the participants to narrate their life stories placed them in a position of ease and provided me with valuable information and means for interpretation regarding their experiences, their decision to leave their birth country and their choice of destination. Aside from this information, these narratives offer insights into specific reasons and/or significant events and circumstances that have impacted and shaped their determination to emigrate, which may reveal some ethnocentric biases, socioeconomic, political, gender, and other differences. Equipped with this knowledge combined with my own immigrant experiences, I embarked on a research journey to "research subjects [who are] participating agents carrying knowledge and interpreting their own life worlds" (Zapata-Barrero & Yalaz, 2018: 272). I aimed to experience their "life worlds" and be better informed about the process interlinking their past in Malaysia and their current circumstances in the United Kingdom.

As mentioned above, I initiated the interview sessions with general and nondescript introductory questions about their background to set the conversation into motion. To give a sense of the participant demographics, selected excerpts from the introductory section of the interviews are presented. These samples are intended to illustrate the profiles selected for the research and provide a glimpse into the types of information shared by the participants, thereby contextualising their backgrounds and experiences within the scope of the research. Here, I selected samples from participants from England (E), Scotland (S), Northern Ireland (NI) and Unassigned (UA). These excerpts provide information about age, country of residence in the United Kingdom, family background, professional background, and other information the interviewees felt necessary to include as part of their self-introduction. As this research aims to protect the participants' privacy and confidentiality, I have omitted specific details that could potentially reveal their profile, such as their name, city/town of residence, professional company name, etc. Below are the selected excerpts of participants' introductions in their own words.

Participants' introduction

> Helena (interviewer/researcher): Tell me about yourself?
>
> E32: My name is […]. I turned 40 last year, I will be 41 this year. I am a journalist. I used to be a full-time journalist. Now a freelance journalist after I had my daughter in 2016. In Malaysia I was a child

> and lived there until I was 17. I came to England in 1998 when I was 18, the summer of 1998.
>
> S08: So full name is […]. I'm 50. […] born in Malaysia, in West Malaysia, and then for most of my childhood, and young adulthood of living in East Malaysia […]. So, I am now in [Scotland], UK. […] left Malaysia to go to school to boarding school in Australia, actually, when I was 15. And then came over to the UK to do A-Levels. And then came up to [Scotland], to do my university degree, studied medicine. […] at that point, I got married, and my husband's British. […] we both ended up just staying in [Scotland].
>
> NI02: [name], 37, arrived […], Northern Ireland in 2007, worked in manufacturing industry in Malaysia before leaving, currently unemployed (R&D Engineer made redundant due to Covid-19).
>
> UA04: [name]. 32 years old. Married with 1 child under 3. Never worked in Malaysia, currently working as a Group Financial Accountant for […]. Arrived in Sept 2007 and have been here ever since.

The narratives featured above from selected participants typically mirror the self-introduction format observed across the study's cohort. While the majority commenced with their names, with some providing their full names, a minority opted to withhold their names to maintain strict anonymity. Although participants were informed about their right to anonymity and the option to abstain from answering any uncomfortable questions prior to the interview, most chose to disclose their names regardless. The disclosure of names could be a sign of trust based on several factors, as "qualitative researchers commonly accept that people's awareness, understanding, trust and consent to participate are prerequisites for conducting research" (Zapata-Barrero & Yalaz, 2018: 260). Many of the participants were recruited through social media platforms or via snowball sampling, where existing research participants recommended others. As a result, these individuals often had a public profile, contributing to a certain level of visibility prior to their involvement in this research. The pre-interview chat was in a way a pre-introduction that helped lessen any unease or awkwardness about speaking to a stranger. Furthermore, knowing that I am a Malaysian immigrant myself and a junior researcher conducting research on a diaspora that has been so far under-researched, may have in some

way helped me gain extra trust. The fact that interviews were conducted during the pandemic when travelling abroad was restricted meant that the virtual interview setting, conducted in the comfort of each other's homes as "informal settings", provided a sort of safe space for participants to express themselves "freely about their experiences and not feel urged to touch upon topics they do not want to talk about" (Zapata-Barrero &Yalaz, 2018: 273).

After providing their names, the majority of participants proceeded to disclose their age, the town/city of residence and the duration of their settlement. Although I did not specifically set an age range as part of the participant recruitment criteria, after the completion of interviews, this information became useful demographic data for conducting a statistical analysis. The participant's age is a variable that can be considered essential, as factors such as physical, perceptual, and cognitive changes are attributable to the aging process and could influence human interactions (Nichols *et al*., 2003). The age at which individuals arrive significantly influences their adaptation process in the host country. The age range of participants is charted below.

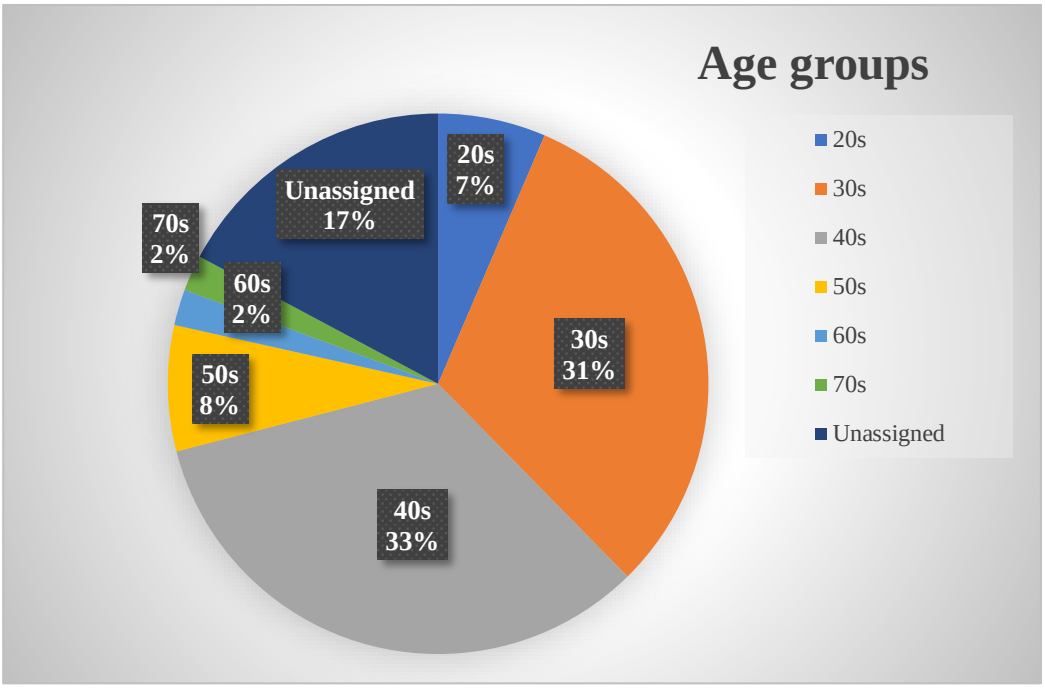

Figure 8: Age groups of participants

While these figures do not represent the entire Malaysian community living in the United Kingdom (as discussed in section 1.3), and only those who participated voluntarily, the age range of the researched participants regarding Malaysian immigrants in the United Kingdom illustrates the representativeness of this research project cohort. When exploring a phenomenon, the information on age, location, and duration helps determine who the researched participants are, where they live, and how long they have been living there, which

aids in the analysis of the possible impact of those variables. Figure 8 illustrates that the participants ranged between the ages of 20 and 70. Most of them were in their 40s (33%); this is followed by 31% in their 30s; 8% were in their 50s; 7% in their 20s; 2% respectively for those in their 60s and 70s, while 17% of them did not state their age. From this figure, one can infer that more than three-quarters of them are in their 30s and 40s, while less than 1/4 are in the 60s and 70s. This may be due to, in my opinion, the demographic that responded to my advertisement asking for voluntary participation being recruited mainly via social media, which may have impacted age groups in different ways. Those who fall under the 30s and 40s group are perhaps more internet savvy and more connected virtually than those in the 60s and 70s group. There may also be an element of participants feeling less Malaysian, assuming that they have lived in the United Kingdom for a long period of time and now feel more British and are thus less interested in this research. These feelings will be explored in detail in part 5. Furthermore, there may be a limited number of Malaysians in the 60-70 age group living in the United Kingdom. The 20s and 50s age groups represent a small fraction of the participants, which could be caused by many factors. For those in their 20s, a possible factor is their not having spent a sufficient amount of time in the United Kingdom to qualify for my interviews and thus not entirely fitting my recruitment criteria. A probable explanation for those in their 50s could be that some are otherwise occupied and did not see the advertisement, or may have left the host country to return to their birth country or elsewhere. Some may feel unconcerned with this research for the likely reason that they are no longer Malaysian nationals. Nearly one-quarter of the participants did not state their age, and this could be attributed to age being considered a sensitive issue, and therefore they were unwilling to share this information. Another reason for withholding their age information could be attributed to wishing to remain completely anonymous for this research.

This youthful demographic profile aligns with the 2021 UK Census data on immigrants and is echoed in the analysis by Shankley *et al.* (in Byrne *et al*., 2020), which observes younger age trends among ethnic minorities compared to the older demographic profile of the White British majority (refer to section 2.3.3). This pattern is attributed to migration trends where younger individuals migrate in search of improved opportunities, reflecting a broader narrative of demographic shifts and economic motivations. This younger demographic has far-reaching effects on various societal sectors, including education, employment, and healthcare, demonstrating economic vibrancy and reduced dependency on public assistance. This observation is reinforced by the 2021 Census data, which reveals notable age differences

among diverse ethnic groups, illustrating the broader societal implications of these demographic trends. Furthermore, the age factor is crucial in examining how first-generation immigrants' aspirations and expectations regarding settlement in the United Kingdom are intertwined with their comfort levels, sense of belonging, and duration of stay. This nuanced exploration of age and its implications for immigrant experiences and societal integration will be further explored in part 5.

Following the mention of their names and ages, participants typically proceeded to disclose their current place of residence and the time of their arrival in the United Kingdom. This information provides insights into the duration of their stay and the geographic distribution of Malaysian settlements across the United Kingdom. To facilitate better visualisation, below are figures of these variables.

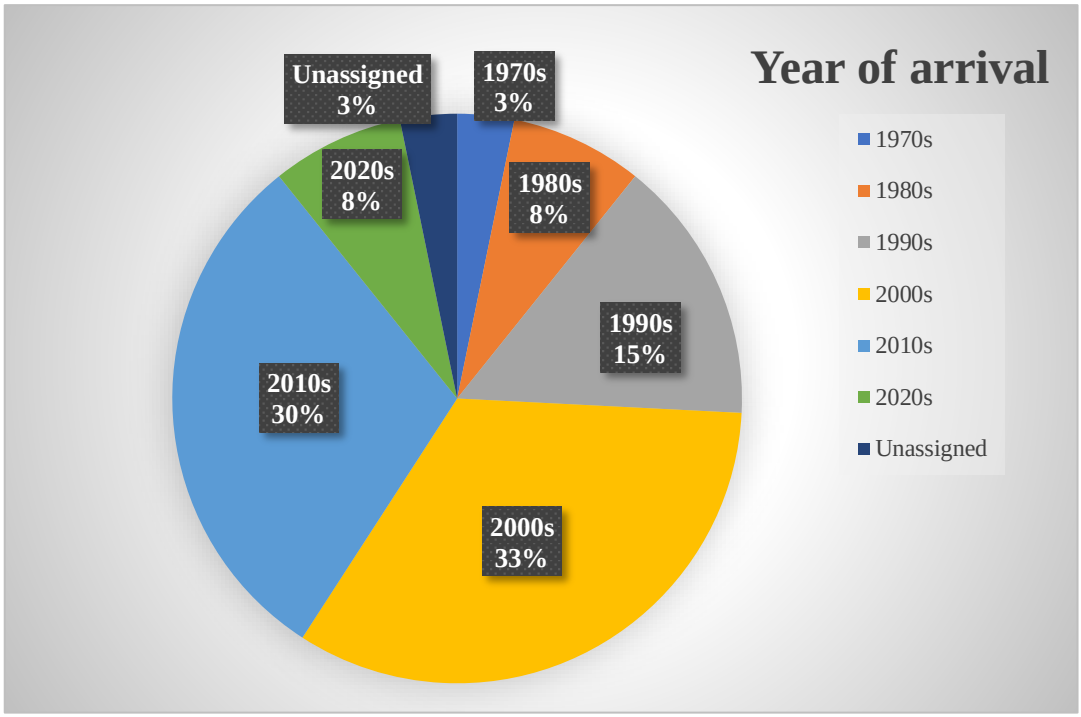

Figure 9: Year of arrival in the UK

Figure 9 shows that most participants arrived in the United Kingdom in the 2000s (33%); 30% in the 2010s; 15% in the 1990s; 8% each in the 1980s and 2020s respectively; 3% in the 1970s, while another 3% were unstated. Part of their self-introduction encompassed where they were located and the year that they had arrived in the United Kingdom. These demographic details inform that each participant moved in varying decades, 3/4 of them moved since the year 2000, while 1/4 of them moved before that. As previously stated, a small fraction of the participants chose not to share details about their residency or arrival time, possibly to either maintain

anonymity, due to an oversight in mentioning it, or because they could not recall the information. The year of arrival variable denotes the duration of their migration in the host country and is particularly interesting in analysing various aspects, such as possible ebb and flows of personal developments as part of their integration/assimilation processes, identity transformation, settlement, sociocultural values and practices, and expectations of the host society. These developments may comprise “their human capital, individual initiatives and aspirations for the future, family life, social relations, residential locations, and occupational

positions" (Morawska in Zapata-Barrero &Yalaz, 2018: 122). The impact of this variable will be explored further in part 5.

The residential patterns of Malaysian participants in the statistical data show a tendency towards residing in England, particularly London and its surrounding areas. A substantial 78% of participants reside in England, with a significant 58% living in London or Greater London, underlining the capital's appeal due to its economic opportunities, educational facilities,

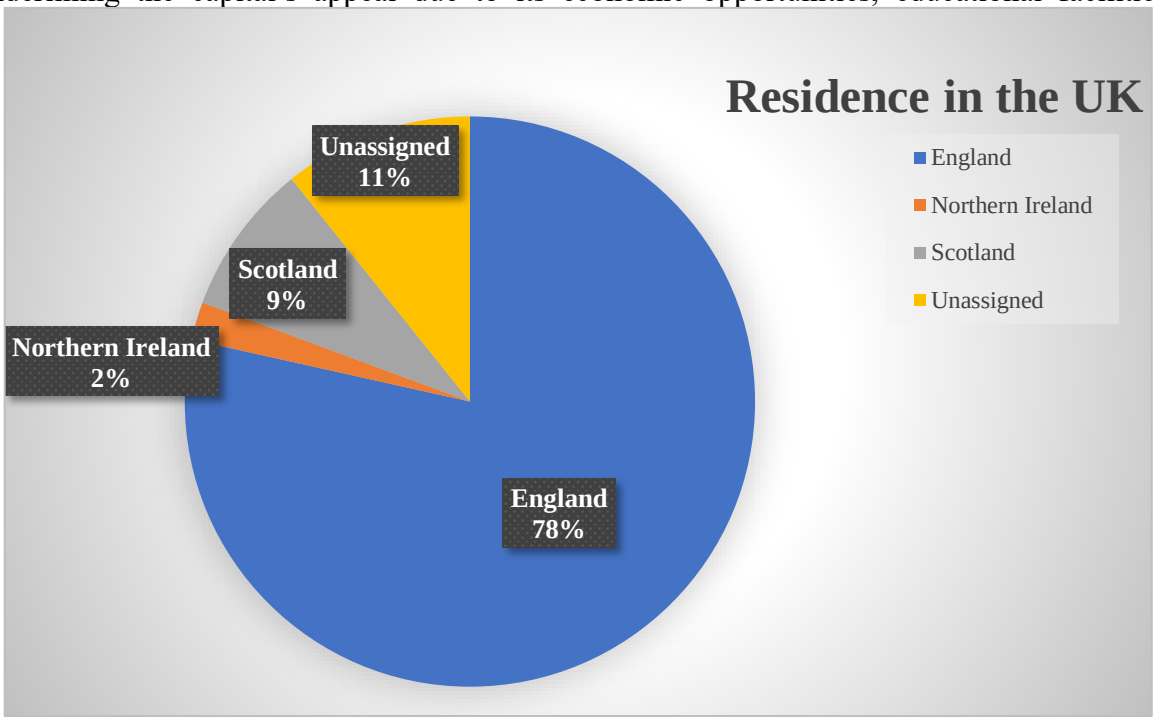

Figure 10: Residence in the UK

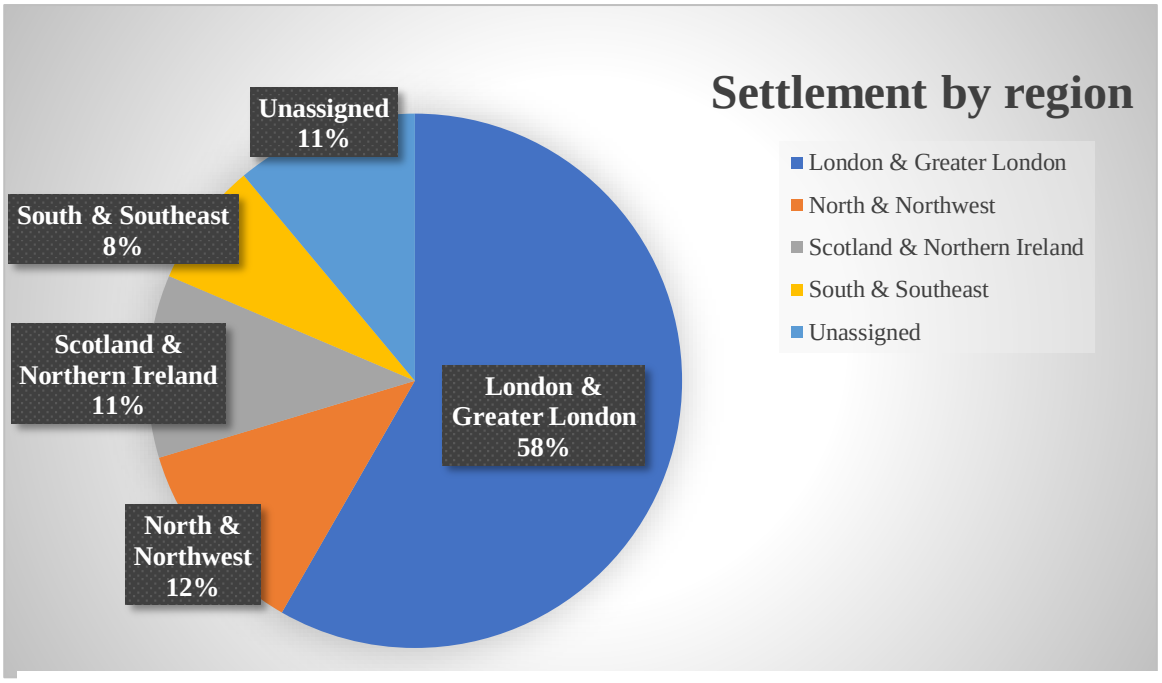

Figure 11: Settlement by region in the UK

community networks, and multicultural environment. Beyond London, 12% of participants live in the North and Northwest of England, in cities like Manchester and Liverpool, known for their diverse populations and opportunities. The data also shows a broader distribution across the United Kingdom, with 11% of participants in Scotland and Northern Ireland residing in cities like Glasgow and Belfast, highlighting a more dispersed Malaysian community. In the South and Southeast of England, 7.5% of the participants reside in cities like Bournemouth and East Grinstead, areas noted for their higher living standards and historical significance, albeit with a smaller Malaysian population compared to London. This geographic spread indicates that while many Malaysians are drawn to urban and economically thriving areas, there is also a significant presence in various regions of the United Kingdom, each offering unique attractions and opportunities.

The concentration in London can be attributed to several factors: it is a cosmopolitan city with a plethora of amenities like Asian grocery stores, restaurants, proximity to the Malaysian Home Office, familial ties, and a sense of community with other Malaysians. These factors, coupled with London's strategic advantages in the labour market, make it a more attractive destination for immigrants, as opposed to other parts of the United Kingdom, where there may be limitations for the reasons previously stated. The recruitment of participants through snowballing via various platforms, where existing participants spread the word within their networks, could have influenced the high concentration in specific areas, especially around London, where Malaysian participants tend to live within the vicinity of one another.

The residential choices of Malaysians in the United Kingdom, predominantly driven by economic opportunities, community networks, educational institutions, and personal preferences, result in a significant concentration in England, particularly in London and its surrounding areas. This clustering illustrates a preference for the vibrant and resource-rich capital, which not only offers a cosmopolitan environment but also serves as a hub for professional and educational advancements. Despite this concentration, there is a noticeable distribution across other regions, indicating a diverse settlement pattern. This geographical distribution correlates with the participants' narratives during their self-introductions, where they discussed their professional activities, reflecting their transitions through various life phases. Such professional pursuits are inherently linked to their chosen places of residence, demonstrating how location preferences are intertwined with career opportunities and personal growth trajectories. The participants described their professional journeys during their self-introductions, highlighting significant transitions in their lives. For some, this transition

involved moving from the completion of tertiary education in the host country to seeking and securing employment within the same country. Others narrated their journey from completing higher education in their country of origin to finding and obtaining employment in the host country. The range of professions among the participants varied widely, encompassing roles such as healthcare professionals, accountants, and legal practitioners. Figure 12 provides a detailed quantitative breakdown of the industries in which the participants were employed at the time of the interview.

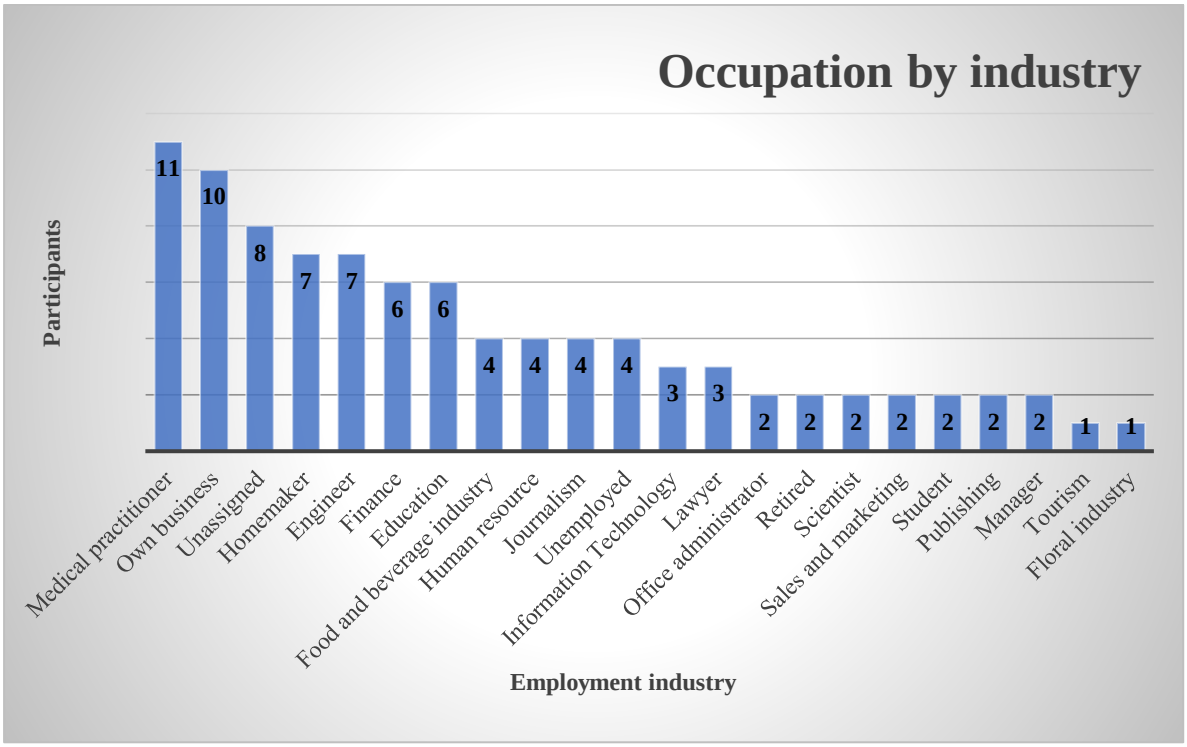

Figure 12: Occupation by industry

The figure provides an observable breakdown of the professional activities of the 93 participants. It reveals that the largest group, comprising 11 individuals, works in the healthcare sector. This is closely followed by 10 participants who own businesses. The figure also shows that there are 7 participants in engineering. In the realms of education and finance, there are 6 participants each, illustrating a diverse range of professional interests within the group. Additionally, 4 participants each are employed in the food and beverage industry, human resources, and journalism, indicating a variety of career paths among the participants. The sectors of information technology and law each have 3 representatives, further showcasing the wide-ranging professional backgrounds of the participants. Smaller groups include 2 participants each in management, office administration, publishing, sales and marketing, and those identified as scientists and students, demonstrating the breadth of industries represented.

There is one participant each working in tourism and the floral industry, highlighting unique career choices within the cohort. At the time of the interview, 7 participants were homemakers and 4 participants were unemployed. Notably, 8 participants chose not to disclose their professional activities, adding a layer of privacy to their responses. This figure not only provides a quantitative view of the participants' occupations but also reflects the diverse professional landscape of the Malaysian diaspora in the United Kingdom.

To recapitulate this data, 12% of these participants are in healthcare and 11% own businesses, while 12% are homemakers or unemployed. As stated by the ONS, the employment of the healthcare workforce is salient; according to the ONS, it is estimated that between 2016 and 2018, 6% of healthcare workers are non-EU nationals (Briggs, 2019; Byrne *et al*., 2020), which might account for the greater number of participants in this field. Indeed, the 2021 ONS data demonstrates that nearly half of specialist medical practitioners are foreign-born, making up 47.5% of the workforce in this sector (refer to section 2.3.7). In the wholesale trade sector, immigrants represent 24.3% of employees. Additionally, the food manufacturing industry employs a considerable proportion of foreign-born workers, with 40.4%, highlighting the substantial impact of immigrants in several essential industries. The observed prevalence of homemakers and unemployed individuals among the participants could stem from a plethora of factors. The COVID-19 pandemic, for instance, had a profound impact on employment, leading to widespread redundancies across various sectors. While the pandemic-induced job losses are significant, they do not account for all instances of unemployment. Many individuals continue to seek employment after being made redundant, signifying that the pandemic is just one of several contributing factors to the current unemployment topography. Additionally, the choice to not engage in paid employment is not always driven by necessity. Some individuals opt to focus on domestic responsibilities, such as childminding, particularly when their partners earn enough to support the household financially. This decision can reflect a strategic family choice, prioritising caregiving or household management over external employment. Such decisions are influenced by economic, social, and personal factors, underlining the diverse reasons behind the employment status of homemakers and unemployed individuals in the current context.

The dataset detailing the professional activities of 93 participants presents a diverse array of occupations among the Malaysian diaspora in the United Kingdom and the group's socioeconomic landscape. A significant representation within the healthcare sector is observed, aligning with Office for National Statistics (ONS) data indicating a considerable proportion of

the foreign-born workforce in this field. This alignment supports the dataset's relevance to broader socioeconomic discussions while emphasising the healthcare sector's role as a major employment avenue for the diaspora. The dataset further reveals a substantial engagement in skilled and high-skilled professions among the participants, suggesting a predilection for a range of middle-class to upper-class socioeconomic statuses. The inclusion of business owners, engineers, educators, and financial experts indicates a strong presence in sectors typically associated with higher economic status and educational attainment. Conversely, the diversity in professional activities extends to roles in the food and beverage, human resources, and journalism sectors, illustrating a broader spectrum of socioeconomic standings. The presence of individuals in less traditionally esteemed roles and those classified as unemployed or homemakers introduces additional complexity, indicating that the socioeconomic statuses within the diaspora are not monolithic but rather span various levels. The element of privacy, as evidenced by the decision of 8 participants to withhold their professional information, draws attention to the challenges in data collection and the limitations inherent in voluntary participation-based studies. This non-disclosure highlights the importance of considering the potential for self-selection bias, where the sample may not adequately represent the broader population's characteristics. The study's methodology, which emphasises qualitative analysis and relies on voluntary participation, may limit the representativeness of the dataset. While the findings offer valuable perspectives on the professional and socioeconomic fabric of the participating Malaysian diaspora, they should not be extrapolated to the entire Malaysian community in the United Kingdom without caution. The potential for self-selection bias suggests that the participants may not be a random sample, thereby limiting the generalisability of the results.

Thus, while the dataset provides insightful observations into the professional diversity and socioeconomic dimensions of the Malaysian diaspora in the United Kingdom, the findings should be interpreted with an understanding of the study's methodological constraints. The data serves as a snapshot of a specific subset of the diaspora, shaped by the unique contexts and choices of the participants. This analysis emphasises the need for a nuanced interpretation of the data, mindful of its limitations and the broader context within which it should be situated for future research or policy formulation regarding the Malaysian community in the United Kingdom.

As discussed earlier, in designing the participant recruitment strategy for this study, meticulous criteria were established to ensure the selection of participants who could provide

rich, relevant empirical data for the thesis analysis. This rigorous approach facilitated the gathering of a cohort of participants whose experiences and perspectives are integral to the depth and validity of the research findings. This chapter serves as a foundational overview that takes a closer look at the participants to acquaint readers with the key demographic characteristics that frame their experiences. It delves into various demographic details, including brief introductions to selected participants, their age groups, years of arrival, and current residences within the United Kingdom. Furthermore, it explores their professional activities post-migration, providing a comprehensive backdrop to their narratives. The inclusion of these participant details is not merely descriptive; it serves a pivotal role in contextualising the forthcoming analysis in Parts 4 and 5 of this thesis. By understanding the participants' backgrounds, readers can appreciate the nuanced interpretations and insights that emerge from the data. Transitioning from the groundwork laid in this chapter, the focus will shift to explore the participants' motivations for migration. The subsequent section delves into this critical aspect, continuing the narrative by examining the reasons behind their decision to migrate, thereby maintaining a logical and coherent flow in the unfolding of the interview-based research.

4.3. Determinants of migration decisions

The flow of immigrants into the United Kingdom is a common phenomenon. It is equally common to encounter people from different backgrounds, as pointed out by Goldberg: "movement and migration […] are the defining socio-historical conditions of humanity" (Goldberg in Hall, 2019 (2000): 98). The ethnic diversity in Britain stems from post-1945 immigration from the Caribbean, the Indian subcontinent, Ireland, and Africa, shaping its multicultural society (Shankley *et al.*, in Byrne *et al.*, 2020). As outlined in sections 2.3.3 and 2.3.5, approximately 9.5 million immigrants, accounting for 14.4% of the United Kingdom's total population, contribute to its demographic composition (ONS, 2021). Out of these, 3.5 million are EU nationals, 6.1 million are non-EU nationals, 2.8 million are from Asia, and 407,000 are from Southeast Asia. The Malaysian diaspora accounts for 78,736 people, under which category the participants from my research fall. Although the number of inflowing immigrants is reported in the Census, the information on the kind of experiences they have post-migration is less known. In migration research on Japan and the United Kingdom, Phillimore *et al.* (2021) established that immigrants often choose to settle in pre-existing ethnic communities and continue to uphold transnational connections with their country of origin. Based on the interviews I conducted with participants, many expressed that the presence of an already established Malaysian community was a significant factor that facilitated their decision to relocate to the United Kingdom, confirming the findings of Phillimore *et al.* (2021).

As shown in the previous section, these 93 participants' years of arrival from Malaysia to the United Kingdom span from the 1970s to the 2020s and can be considered as fairly recent migration since they are first-generation immigrants. In stark contrast to recent Malaysian immigration, the United Kingdom saw significant influxes from its Caribbean, African, and Indian colonies during the late 19th and early 20th centuries, primarily to fill labour shortages (refer to section 2.3.1). The comparison illuminates the United Kingdom's migration evolution from colonial labour demands to modern diverse influxes, mirroring its shifting economic and historical backdrop. Questions on the reasons that initiated Malaysian individuals' moves to the United Kingdom and how they have coped with migration, their sense of belonging and identity transformation, and how they engaged with their new host society are salient to me in understanding their lived experiences. The responses to these questions cannot be quantified numerically. Instead, our comprehension of the difficulties faced during their integration and settlement in a new environment is enriched through the stories shared by participants in qualitative interviews. Although my research participants originate from a spectrum of middle-

class to upper-class backgrounds, enjoying socioeconomic stability in their home country, they share similarities with the subjects of Ho's (2011) and O'Connor's (2016) studies, which focused on Singaporeans and Indians in the United Kingdom, respectively, who also hail from middle to upper-middle and high-income families. Despite their financial stability, these individuals chose to migrate to the United Kingdom, prompted by a multitude of reasons. This chapter seeks to explore the determinant factors behind their emigration from Malaysia to the United Kingdom.

The 2021 ONS Census provided an overview of migration patterns into the United Kingdom, specifically focusing on the primary motivations driving the non-British population to relocate. The census revealed that a significant number, 2 million immigrants, identified employment as their principal reason for relocation to the United Kingdom. This group included a substantial representation from the European Union, with 1.5 million EU nationals, alongside 568,000 from non-EU countries, 231,000 from Asia, and 30,000 from the Southeast Asian region. Despite these detailed statistics, the census fell short of offering a specific breakdown for Malaysian nationals, leaving a gap in understanding the exact scale of Malaysian workers in the United Kingdom. In the educational sector, the census indicated that 831,000 immigrants were residing in the UK for study-related reasons, with 41,000 of these individuals coming from Southeast Asia. However, like the employment data, this did not include precise details for Malaysian students. In contrast, the Malaysian Ministry of Higher Education provided a targeted report, stating that there were 5,265 Malaysian students engaged in tertiary education within the United Kingdom in 2021, which gives a clearer picture of this demographic. The ONS report also touched on family-related migration, noting that 2 million immigrants had moved to the United Kingdom to accompany or join their spouse. This cohort included 946,000 EU nationals and 1.1 million non-EU nationals, with Southeast Asians accounting for 71,000. Yet again, the specific number of Malaysian nationals in this category was not detailed, pointing to an area where data collection could be enhanced for better clarity. These findings from the ONS highlight the diverse motivations behind migration to the United Kingdom, reflecting the country's role as a significant destination for employment, education, and family reunification. While the data offers a broad view of migration trends, the lack of country-specific details, particularly for Malaysians, affirms the need for more exhaustive data collection to fully understand these dynamics.

With an overview of the reasons immigrants migrate to the United Kingdom, a closer look at the main reasons for my Malaysian participants' move to the United Kingdom is illustrated in Figure 13.

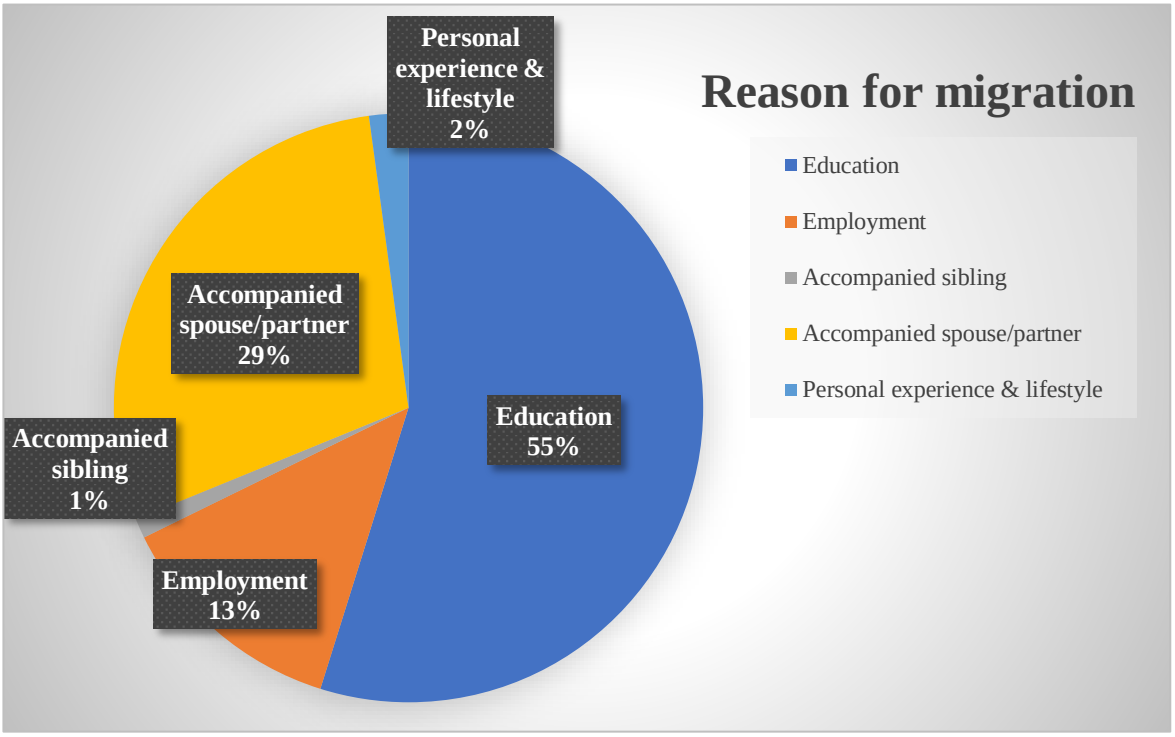

Figure 13: Reason for migration

Based on participants' narratives, a notable 55% identified education as their primary reason for migrating, a statistic that speaks volumes about the United Kingdom's reputation as a hub for higher learning and its strong pull factor on Malaysian students seeking quality education abroad. This trend not only reflects the individuals' quest for academic excellence but also the broader implications for educational exchanges and international relations between Malaysia and the United Kingdom. The figure also reveals that 29% of the participants migrated to be with their spouse or partner, highlighting the significant influence of personal and relational factors on migration patterns. This finding suggests a considerable number of Malaysians are making life-altering decisions based on their family ties and relationships, emphasising the intertwined nature of personal relationships and migration dynamics. In contrast, a mere 13% relocated for employment opportunities. This suggests that for this group, career aspirations were not as compelling as educational or familial motives. Alternatively, it could imply that they secured employment after settling in their new location. This insight could provoke further inquiry into the nature of the employment market and the availability of professional opportunities in the United Kingdom for Malaysians.

Additionally, the data points to a smaller segment of the population—2% and 1%, respectively—migrating for lifestyle changes or to accompany a sibling. These figures, although minor, add depth to the understanding of migration motivations, showcasing a spectrum of personal reasons beyond the more common educational and familial drivers. The analysis also showcases that over half of the participants embarked on a journey to the United Kingdom for educational purposes, while nearly a third followed their spouse or partner, possibly for related reasons such as joint educational pursuits or employment opportunities. This observation suggests a pattern of combined motivations, where education and familial relationships intersect in the decision to migrate. The relatively low percentage of individuals who migrate solely for employment offers a discussion point. It suggests a potential satisfaction with or preference for local employment opportunities in Malaysia, indicating that the domestic job market may possess sufficient allure or adequacy to retain its workforce. Conversely, it also highlights potential challenges in securing employment abroad, particularly due to the stringent visa regimes associated with obtaining employment visas in the United Kingdom, which may deter individuals from pursuing employment opportunities abroad. This detailed breakdown not only aids in understanding the personal choices behind migration but also contributes to broader discussions on migration policies, bilateral relations, and the socioeconomic interconnections between Malaysia and the United Kingdom.

As discussed in section 2.2.6, the global Malaysian population was estimated to be over 1 million in 2010. This number has since risen to 1.86 million by 2020, according to the Department of Statistics, Malaysia (2022). The same source reveals that the majority of the Malaysian diaspora consists of non-*Bumiputeras*, while *Bumiputeras* form the remainder. The department further reports that of the Malaysians aged 25 and above, 844,000 are part of the diaspora. Nearly 455,000 of these individuals are engaged in highly skilled professions and have completed tertiary education. The report also highlights an increasing trend of emigration, with approximately "100,000 Malaysians […] emigrating overseas annually and the number is still increasing. This is especially acute in the highly skilled areas of advanced financial markets, telecommunication, biotechnology, material science and nanotechnology with increased outbound migration of surgeons, doctors and highly specialized educationists and professionals" (DOSM, 2022). To gain a deeper understanding of this phenomenon, I will analyse the narratives of the participants, focusing on the factors that influenced their decision to migrate. This analysis will be conducted in descending order of frequency, starting with the most common trajectory.

4.3.1. British education

The reputation of British education as a symbol of social prestige and employment security is innately a colonial legacy in many postcolonial nations and is particularly apparent in Malaysia. As Selvaratnam confirms, "a university degree has been regarded as a passport to lifelong security, comfort, and status" (1988: 183). Even though international education includes other western nations like Australia, the United States of America, Taiwan and Egypt, there is a tendency to favour British university education. Since the independence of Malaysia in 1957, development and growth in education have taken a front seat, and Malaysia had become the third largest exporter of students abroad by 1985 (UNESCO, 2013). With student loans and scholarships offered to Malaysians who seek financial support, the pursuit of international education has been significant and rather appealing. The statistics provided by the Malaysian Ministry of Higher Education on Malaysian students enrolled in universities abroad from 2002 to 2020 are charted in Figure 14.

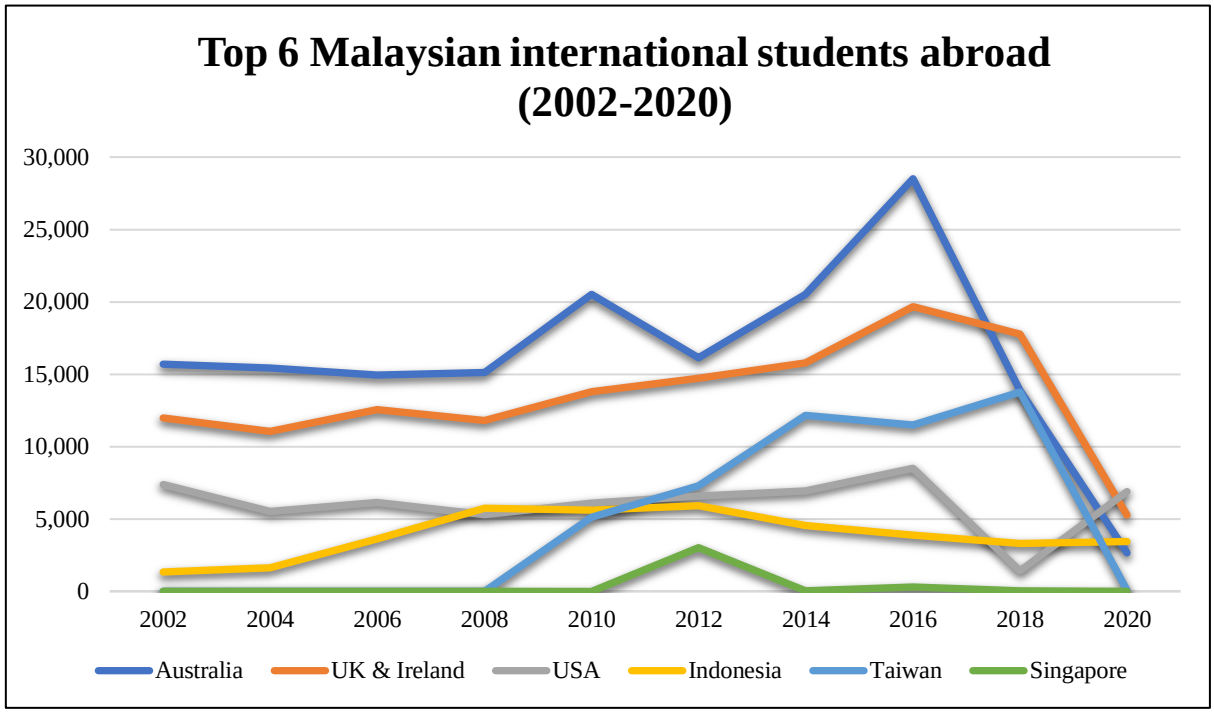

Figure 14: Adapted - Top 6 destinations of Malaysian international students abroad (2002-2020). Source: Statistics, Ministry of Higher Education, Malaysia

The observable data illustrates that the choice for international education has been high in countries such as Australia and the United Kingdom over the last 18 years. Australia remains the preferred destination for a significant number of Malaysian students, reaching a peak enrolment of 28,504 in 2016. This preference is largely attributed to Australia's geographical proximity to Malaysia, which not only facilitates easier travel but also offers a sense of

closeness to home for the students and their families. The country positions itself as a more cost-effective option, especially in the Asia-Pacific region where there is a substantial demand for cross-border degree programmes taught in English, serving as a viable alternative to both the United States and the United Kingdom (Marginson in Cheung *et al*., 2016). After Australia, the UK and Ireland rank as the second most popular destination for Malaysian students, with 19,666 students in 2016. This preference is largely due to the historical British colonial influence on Malaysia, which has led to similarities in the educational systems of the two countries. However, there was a notable shift in 2020, with Australia hosting only 2,658 Malaysian students. This decrease could be attributed to Australia's response to Covid-19, which strongly discouraged international students. In contrast, the UK and Ireland saw an increase to 5,256, and the USA had 6,910 Malaysian students. This shift indeed reflects a diversification in the study destinations preferred by Malaysian students, highlighting a broader range of choices beyond the traditional preferences. While the aggregate numbers for the UK and Ireland in 2020 show a total of 5,256 students, it is important to acknowledge that this figure does not specify the distribution between the two. Therefore, there could be a higher concentration of Malaysian students in either the United Kingdom or Ireland, but without detailed data, the exact numbers remain uncertain. This signifies the need for more granular statistics to fully understand the preferences and trends within the Malaysian student diaspora.

There is also a trend towards international education in the USA, Indonesia, Singapore and Taiwan. Taiwan appears to have gained popularity with its steady flow of Malaysian students. The increase in Malaysian students attending universities in Taiwan can be partially attributed to the linguistic and cultural affinity that Malaysian students of Chinese descent, who speak Chinese languages and have been educated in Chinese-medium schools, have with Taiwan. Similarly, Indonesia's growing popularity as a tertiary education destination for Malaysian students is likely influenced by factors such as geographical proximity and shared linguistic, gastronomic, and religious aspects. In contrast, despite Singapore's close geographical, historical, and economic ties with Malaysia, there is a noticeable lack of detailed data regarding the number of Malaysian students in Singaporean higher education institutions. The statistics presented in Figure 14, which show a significant number of Malaysians pursuing tertiary education abroad, highlight the trend and importance of international education among Malaysian students.

Since the year 2000, Australia has consistently remained a top choice for Malaysian students seeking education abroad, yet the United Kingdom has increasingly become a sought-

after destination for both government-sponsored and self-financed Malaysian students. This trend may be attributed to the long-standing perception of British education's superiority, a belief rooted in Malaysia's colonial history with Britain and the enduring legacy of British educational traditions. Such perspectives are not just about academic excellence but also reflect the cultural prestige associated with British education. The preference for international education among Malaysian students seems to reflect a broader inclination towards Western educational values, which are often associated with high-quality qualifications and prestige. Cheung *et al*. corroborate this insight through their qualitative interviews with students. They state that the students in the target markets perceive Western education as more prestigious and "superior" than Eastern education, with a preference for studying in "the USA, the UK, and Australia to Singapore and Hong Kong" (2016: 119). This perception is influenced by the belief that Western countries lead in higher education and specific disciplines like "medicine, engineering, and business" (2016: 119). Consequently, attending renowned universities in these Western nations is seen as beneficial for future careers. They support these narratives with data from the UNESCO Institute for Statistics (2014):

> [T]he USA and the UK ranked first and second in attracting international students in 2012, followed by France, Australia, and Germany. Thus, all of the first five most attractive destinations are indeed Western countries. (Cheung *et al*., 2016: 119)

Their conclusion is aligned with my data in Figure 14, which clearly shows a rising trend of Malaysians pursuing education overseas, indicating a desire for international exposure and experiences that differ from the local educational environment. Furthermore, in an article titled "The world's top 100 universities" in the *QS World University Rankings*, Craig Ocallaghan listed Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), USA; University of Cambridge, UK; University of Oxford, UK; Harvard University, USA; Stanford University, USA, and Imperial College London, UK as the top universities in the world (2024). These institutions are recognised globally for their high-quality education, research opportunities, and the diverse and inclusive environment they provide, which can be appealing to students from around the world, including Malaysians. This supports the argument that there is a strong desire among Malaysians to study at top-tier universities abroad, possibly due to the perception that these institutions offer superior education, better opportunities for personal and professional development, and a valuable international network. The analysis effectively ties the observed data trend with a broader context of global educational aspirations, illustrating how the desire

for quality education and international experiences is driving Malaysians to pursue their studies in foreign countries, particularly in renowned universities.

Many reasons have been cited by the participants for their choice of wanting to migrate in order to obtain an international education. 55% of the participants left Malaysia to pursue an education in the United Kingdom. A notable reason has not only been about "limited access to good quality education in Malaysia" (Francis-Granger, 2023: 97), but also about the ethnic-based quota system. The Malaysian public tertiary education institutions offer tuition fees that are reasonable, nevertheless, there is a restriction on enrolment into such institutions due to a quota system based on one's ethnicity (explained in detail in section in 2.2.5). In order to successfully guarantee a place at a public university, a Malaysian with an ethnic minority background has to achieve exceptional grades (Francis-Granger, 2023). For example, E04, E011, E69, S08, and E20 relocated to the United Kingdom for tertiary education at a university there due to the lack of such opportunities in their birth country:

> E04: I came here to do my final year at university to do my degree in computer networks at the University of […]. The plan was just to come and do the final year, which was only one-year […] back then private colleges in Malaysia didn't offer tertiary education, unless you were accepted to study in the public universities, which meant you either had to be a Bumiputera or had scored straight As in O/A-levels as a non-Bumiputera. For the rest of us, the only other option was to go overseas.

> E11: Came to England for university education. As being only an average student and Chinese, back then in the 1990s I had no chance in getting a place in a local university. These were the days way before the proliferation of private universities in Malaysia.

> E69: To be fair it was now 1990s. […]. And at that time, it was very difficult for non-Malays to get into a Malaysian university, local uni, especially in the course that you might want to choose. There was a quota which was very strict. So, the chances of me sitting for STPM and getting straight As to get into university back in Malaysia… well… I just was not a straight A student. So that was part of the issue. I mean, now things are better. And there are more universities as well. But then the early 1990s there was hardly anything. There were no private universities in Malaysia. So, you basically just left

> with local universities, but the competition would have been very, very fierce. […]. If my parents weren't able to afford me going, then I would have had a different life. But because I could afford private A-Levels education I could afford to be sent abroad. […] ideally, it would have been to just go to university within Malaysia in the other states at that time. It just wasn't possible, and even getting scholarships at that time was very difficult. […] the JPN scholarships and all that to go abroad […] I was one of the last few where education in tertiary education in Malaysia would be near impossible.
>
> S08: Came over to the UK to do A-Levels. And then came up to [Scotland] to do my university degree, studied medicine. […] when I was a kid, in our community there was, you know, a lot of families would send their kids overseas to study because of the quota system, there were not enough spaces, if you wanted to do certain things.
>
> E20: I did go for an interview to do physio when I was in […], and the guy blatantly told me that the quota for Indians has run out. And he said, if you're Malay, there is still opportunity, but because you're Indian the quota has run out basically. So, I decided, well, the only way I'm going to get anywhere is to go overseas to study. So, I did my A-Levels in the UK.

The excerpts provided offer a compelling illustration of the ethnically skewed educational system prevalent in Malaysia. It is suggested that possessing a "Malay" (E20) or "Bumiputera" (E04) identity significantly enhances one's prospects of securing a spot in a Malaysian public university. Conversely, for a "non-Bumiputera" (E04), achieving flawless academic scores was essential, as being "an average student and Chinese" (E11) effectively closed the doors to local university admission. This challenge extended to specific course selections within universities, where non-Malays found it particularly tough to gain entry. This is further observed in E69's account of the difficulty non-Malays face in accessing desired university courses, prompting many families to seek educational opportunities abroad due to the restrictive quota system. Similarly, E20's experience with the physiotherapy course quota reflects this ethnic-based educational barrier, highlighting the necessity to look abroad for educational advancement. These participants stipulate that belonging to an ethnic minority group in Malaysia left them with narrow options for gaining entry into public universities for tertiary education. Additionally, "one must either achieve near perfect results in order to be accepted into a public

university, or go abroad, provided one has sufficient private funds to do so" (Francis-Granger, 2023: 97-98), which is in line with E69's narrative on how her parents "could afford private A-Levels education [and] be sent abroad". Due to the dearth of educational options for Malaysian ethnic minorities, migration for international education has become one of the key solutions, just as seen with E02 who "came here to study really, as all Malaysians do", reinforcing the majority of the participants' reasons for moving being for the purpose of education. This trend, coupled with the entrenched ethnic stereotypes and hierarchies dating back to British colonial administration, is deeply rooted in Malaysian policies, causing limitations for those who desire to gain access to tertiary education. The only option for Malaysian ethnic minority students to access education is to migrate for education to bypass the ethnic-based university placement quotas and have a fair chance at education. As a consequence of this policy, there has been a proliferation of private tertiary education institutions set up to cater to those seeking education beyond the secondary school level. While private education institutions present an alternative pathway for higher learning, they often come with substantial financial burdens due to their exorbitant tuition fees. Additionally, there is no guarantee that the quality of education they provide matches the standards of esteemed higher education institutions abroad, which could affect the overall value and effectiveness of the education received.

A correlation between the participants' parents and the participants' education migration trajectory can be observed. Their parents have played a significant role in their future in terms of providing international education and employment security as part of a strategic plan. The following narratives will demonstrate how socioeconomic mobility has been a component of "family histories of migration" (Koh, 2017: 109). Some of the participants' parents may have received British education either in Malaysia or abroad. They also would have witnessed amendments in the Malaysian education system and implementations of affirmative action policies in the 1970s in postcolonial Malaysia (Koh, 2017). In this fashion, their parents' influence on the education migration trajectory was substantial, given that their generation was educated during Malaysia's initial nation-building and development years (Koh, 2017). Thus, parents had to strategically plan ahead for their children's future endeavours by placing importance on sending them abroad for education, particularly to the United Kingdom. E72's and E42's narratives attest to the premise of family history and tradition of investment in and devotion to British education:

> E72: During my life in Malaysia, I didn't go to a government school, but to a private international school instead. My dad did his ENT training and his

> fellowship exams and stuff like that in the UK. And, I suppose in Malaysia, because of colonial influence, naturally people tend to look up to and follow the British way of life, you know, like the way we drive, language. And from a young age, my dad always told me that for the high standards of education and lifestyle, it was all in the UK. Plus, I visited the UK a few times in my life before, my sister lives here and I have more relatives here. So, obviously a lot of my experience is based on growing up with British influence. So, it was a natural progression to study medicine, as UK medical still ranked high in the world. I went there for university, and I suppose there was always this sense of familiarity and similar kind of structures.
>
> E42: I was born in Malaysia but moved to the UK for my dad's work, and we had a British PR, then went back to Malaysia for 10 years. So, it was always understood that I'd come back here to go to university. I've always had a British education. My brother stayed here at boarding school, and I went back to international school in Malaysia. And then when I was 18, I came back to the UK, and actually never really left. I stayed on because it was just easier, all my friends are here, I speak the language fluently, and I work here. It is familiar, and I don't think I'd move back to Malaysia.

E72's account highlights a familial legacy of pursuing education in the United Kingdom, tracing back to his father's advanced training and examinations in the United Kingdom, which instilled in him from a young age the perception that this nation epitomised superior education and lifestyle standards. This tradition continued with his sister and other relatives residing there, reinforcing the nation's role as a preferred destination for educational migration among Malaysians, who often admire and emulate the British way of life. E72's prior education in a Malaysian private international school, steeped in British influence, further shaped his inclination towards an international educational journey, culminating naturally in his decision to study medicine in the United Kingdom, where medical education is highly esteemed globally. Similarly, E42's educational and residential choices were influenced by her father's employment in the United Kingdom, leading to her family acquiring British permanent residency. Despite a decade spent in Malaysia, the expectation of returning to the United Kingdom for university was ingrained in her, nurtured by a continuous British educational background and her brother's stay in a boarding school. This narrative illustrates the profound impact of parental decisions on the educational pathways of their children, embedding a

preference for British education deep within their family values. Together, E72 and E42's stories illustrate how family traditions and early influences can decisively shape educational trajectories, positioning the United Kingdom as a preferred destination for study due to its perceived educational excellence and lifestyle appeal. These narratives feature a generational pattern where the pursuit of British education is not only a personal choice but a familial tradition and expectation, deeply interwoven into the fabric of their lives as a "natural progression".

From the interviews, I understood that those who travelled to the United Kingdom for tertiary education believed that it was unequivocally the best option because British universities were considered prestigious. The following excerpts were selected to prove this point:

> E65: It was mainly due to my father's influence, who had previously studied and worked in the UK in the 70s. Clearly, he has high regards for the quality of education in UK universities and so he was keen for us (my brothers and I) to be educated here. The only other country I did consider was Singapore where I was already based, having completed my A-Levels there.

> S01: As UK is prestigious and being a former British colony or this kind of thing, they're much better […]. But yeah, from small you kind of like get this idea of going abroad. […]. So, I think that was more of an attraction, obviously, education wise, they say, you know, UK provide quality education. So that was another factor. And my second brother, he went to UK to study as well. So that kind of like, influenced me a bit as well.

> UA04: Education, parents wanted to send me to a UK university as it's known for providing the best education.

> E30: UK was top of my father's choice in terms of education. When I was in […], the university was partner twinned to 20 universities around the world, including Canada, USA, Australia, New Zealand, Ireland, and the UK. I selected universities in the UK as I also believed in the value of the education system, but also because I had previously been in the country for boarding school […].

> E04: During my Uni studies, and also at the time in Malaysia, the UK education was held a little bit more, if not more esteem and worth. Its

> education system was a little bit above than America and Australia, I thought at the time.

What I gather from these narratives is that British education is taken as a symbol of honour and prestige linked to "quality", "best", "value", "esteem" and "worth". As revealed earlier, there is an inclination towards the pursuit for British education to ensure, as mentioned earlier, "lifelong security, comfort, and status" (Selvaratnam, 1988: 183). By extension, a discernible inclination exists among Malaysian students, like E65, towards international education over local offerings, with E65 having pursued her A-Levels in Singapore before transitioning to the United Kingdom for advanced studies. This preference is deeply rooted in parental perspectives, who hold British education in high esteem, viewing it as the ultimate choice for their children's academic pursuits, as evidenced by E65's and E30's experiences. This parental endorsement reflects a widespread belief in the superior value of a British degree. Moreover, the preference for the United Kingdom is not just in comparison to Malaysian education but extends globally, with former students like E30 and E04 deliberately choosing the United Kingdom over other renowned education hubs like "Canada, USA, Australia, New Zealand, Ireland". This choice is underpinned by a conviction that British education offers unparalleled quality and prestige, surpassing even other esteemed systems in countries like America and Australia.

This perception aligns with the research by Cheung *et al.* (2016) and Alves and King (in Scholten, 2022), which hold educational institutions in the United States and the United Kingdom in high esteem. They contend that international education is increasingly perceived as a strategic asset, providing significant cultural and economic benefits. Additionally, it corresponds with O'Callaghan's 2024 list of top universities, where institutions from these two countries are prominently featured, further validating the preference for these countries as prime destinations for tertiary education. These references collectively affirm the perceived academic prestige and superiority of universities in these nations, influencing the global educational migration patterns. Such perceptions fuel the migration of Malaysian students to the United Kingdom, driven by a consensus that British universities stand at the pinnacle of global education, as suggested by S01 and UA04's narratives. This belief system emphasises a broader narrative: that British education is not merely a pathway to academic excellence but a strategic move towards securing a perceived superior future. I speculate that conducting qualitative interviews in the United States of America, mirroring the methodology applied to this research cohort, would likely yield a different perspective, with a tendency to favour the

educational system in the United States of America over that of the United Kingdom. This assumption is grounded in my hypothesis that local context could significantly influence perceptions of educational quality and preference, suggesting that participants might exhibit a bias towards their chosen destination country.

Figure 15 provides a detailed visualisation of the educational qualifications obtained by the 51 individuals who moved to the United Kingdom for education purposes, classifying the data by degree level.

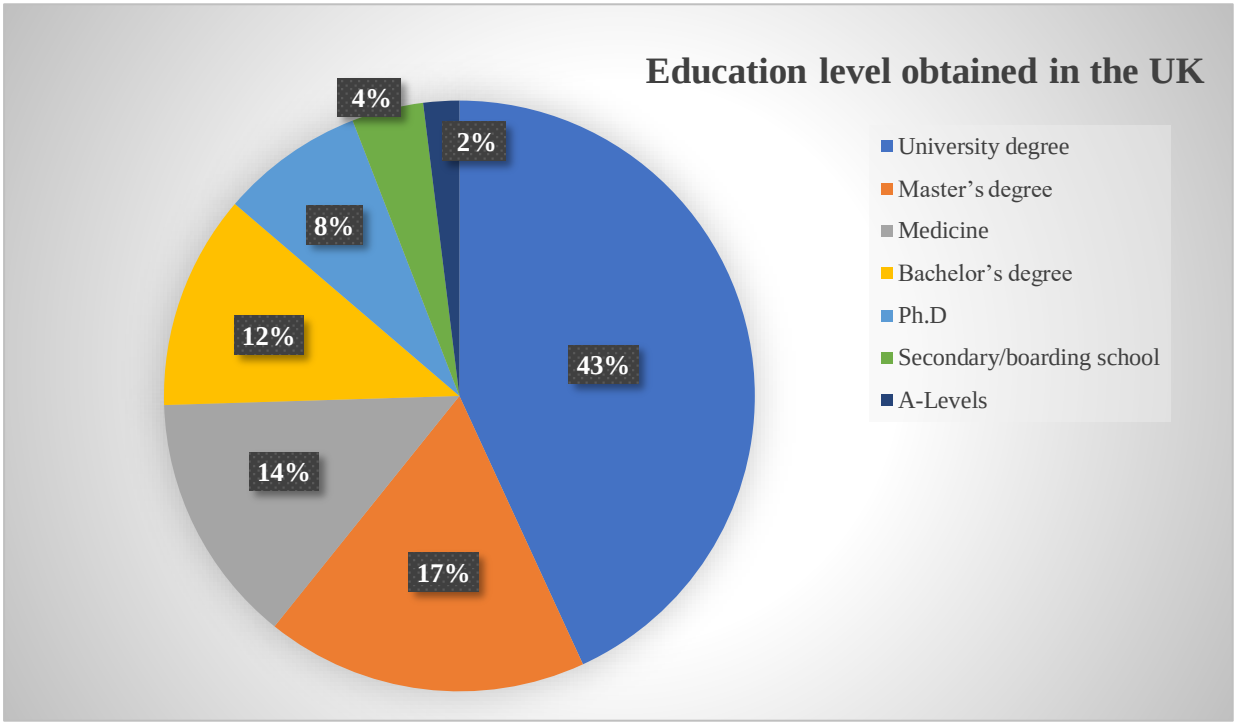

Figure 15: Education level obtained in the UK

The educational pursuits of Malaysians in the United Kingdom demonstrate a pronounced focus on higher education, particularly at the tertiary level, with 43% of individuals holding university degrees, a cohort that did not specify the exact level they obtained (bachelor's or master's). This significant trend towards obtaining higher education abroad is further highlighted by the presence of 12% bachelor's and 17% master's degree holders, though the relatively low number of 8% Ph.D. holders may suggest an area for potential growth and support. The noteworthy number of 14% of individuals with medical degrees emphasises a distinct preference for the medical field, attributable to the appealing opportunities, the esteemed quality of medical education, and the high demand for medical professionals. This observation aligns with Byrne *et al.*'s (2020) analysis, which highlights that, according to the 2021 ONS Census, almost half of the specialist medical practitioners in the United Kingdom

are foreign-born. Conversely, the limited representation of early-stage education, with just 2% possessing A-Levels and 4% having secondary or boarding school education, suggests a possibility that these individuals may have engaged in further studies. However, they may have only cited their initial reason for entering the country during the interview sessions, not mentioning any subsequent educational pursuits. Furthermore, when considering the distribution of these former students across various United Kingdom universities—such as the University of Liverpool, University College London (UCL), the University of Sheffield, University of East London (UEL), University of Leeds, and notably the repeated mentions of University of Cambridge, Edinburgh, Glasgow, Belfast, and Manchester—it becomes apparent that there is a diverse range of institutional preferences among Malaysian students. This diversity, ranging from globally acclaimed universities like Cambridge to more specialised institutions like UEL, provides insight into the myriad motivations and objectives driving these students' educational decisions. The critical examination of both the degree types and the chosen universities reveals a nuanced landscape of Malaysian students' educational endeavours in the United Kingdom. This analysis brings to the fore the socioeconomic backgrounds of the participants, showing that they are highly skilled individuals originating predominantly from middle-class to upper-class backgrounds. This insight suggests that their educational pursuits in the United Kingdom are likely influenced by their economic and social standings, enabling them to access and leverage the opportunities provided by prestigious British institutions.

The participants in this research have provided insightful accounts of how they have employed numerous strategies for the pursuit of an international education, accompanied by various factors such as prior formative educational years, financial resources, family educational tradition, and British cultural legacy. While these strategies could be interpreted as innovative initiatives towards fulfilling educational aspirations, they could also be seen as ideas embedded in the British colonial legacy, as noted by some of the participants. The narratives suggest a deep-rooted and instinctive allure towards British education, perceived almost axiomatically as synonymous with quality and excellence. This perception is so entrenched that it borders on being a form of brainwashing, suggesting a trusting and widespread acceptance of British education as the superior choice. Interestingly, research by Ho (2011) and O'Connor (2016) supports the importance of acquiring British education. Ho's study focuses on Singaporeans who pursued higher education in the United Kingdom, highlighting the critical role of "accruing an overseas education and international exposure" in enhancing career opportunities (2011: 14). The research exemplifies the perception that international education

is a strategic avenue for accumulating "cultural capital and social networks", both of which are instrumental in boosting "future employment prospects" (2011: 14). Furthermore, Ho contends that the experience of studying and working internationally is increasingly seen as "an essential spatial strategy" for acquiring the necessary skills and competencies for a global career, enabling individuals to navigate a "boundaryless career and become a global careerist" (2011: 14). Ho's contention aligns with O'Connor's study on the Indian diaspora in the United Kingdom, which highlights how "their ingrained tenacity and aspiration towards higher education" have placed them in "the middle classes" and "the cultural spaces" within British society (2016: 140).

Consequently, acquiring a quality British education is not only about academic prestige but also serves as a conduit to enhanced employment opportunities and the prospect of adopting a British way of life, further entrenching its perceived value and desirability. The ramifications of British legacy in Malaysia have not only driven many Malaysians to pursue education in the former coloniser's country for its perceived excellence but have also influenced them to choose the United Kingdom above all others for the "familiarity and similar kind of structures" (E72) known to Malaysians through the education system there (see 2.2.5). As such, the participants' migration to the United Kingdom appears as a natural choice resulting from exposure to and influence by the British in the past, and this presumably facilitates their integration into the cultural and social setting in the United Kingdom. Thus, I argue that the preference for British education in postcolonial Malaysia is influenced not solely by the remnants of British colonial legacies but also by a confluence of family tradition, economic motivations, and individual choice. This complexity of inclining towards British education extends beyond historical inertia; it is also shaped by familial values, the perceived economic advantages of a British education, and the personal preferences of individuals. While these narratives weave a tapestry of educational traditions and aspirations, one fact remains undeniable: British influence continues to exert a significant presence in the Malaysian education milieu, illustrating that the preference is not merely *ipso facto* due to colonial legacies but also deeply intertwined with personal and economic factors.

4.3.2. Accompanying family

There are numerous motivations for an individual to relocate internationally alongside their spouse or partner. These motivations can encompass a desire to raise children with their spouse or partner, maintain familial cohesion, experience a different cultural milieu, or support their spouse's or partner's career objectives. Within the cohort of study participants, following a spouse or partner—or, in rarer instances, a sibling—due to their work or educational opportunities emerged as a significant migration driver, second only to educational pursuits. As delineated in Figure 13 of Chapter 4.3, 29% emigrated from Malaysia to accompany their spouse or partner, whereas one participant did so to be with a sibling in the United Kingdom. This research reveals the diverse nature of migration, demonstrating that decisions are profoundly influenced by familial relationships, particularly those with spouses, partners, or siblings. Such decisions bear considerable implications for the family unit, catalysing their migratory paths. This section will delve into the diverse trajectories of migration shaped by these relational dynamics, scrutinising how these personal connections influence the broader migration landscape. Further analysis unveiled distinct categories among the spouses and partners encountered in the interviews: firstly, those who are Malaysian nationals and have relocated to the United Kingdom; secondly, those who are British nationals; and thirdly, spouses or partners holding citizenship from other European countries. This categorisation aids in understanding the nuanced ways in which national identity intersects with migratory experiences, enriching the comprehension of complex transnational migration.

In examining the first category, which focuses on Malaysian nationals who have migrated from Malaysia to the United Kingdom, it becomes imperative to delve into the specifics of their migration, particularly the underlying reasons driving their spouse or partner's relocation. To elucidate this aspect, the nature of migration has been further subcategorised into two primary reasons: employment and education. For instance, a closer look at the data discloses specific cases where individuals followed their spouses due to employment opportunities in the United Kingdom. Participants such as E07, E21, and E62 represent instances where the migration decision was predominantly influenced by the spouse's acquisition of an employment position in the United Kingdom. This subset of data provides beneficial knowledge on the employment-related migration patterns among Malaysian nationals moving to the United Kingdom, highlighting job opportunities abroad and family migration decisions. By dissecting these particular instances, this analysis aims to shed light on the broader trends and motivations

underpinning the migration choices of Malaysian nationals accompanying their spouses or partners.

Malaysian nationals

> E07: We came here because my husband was made the area manager for UK for the […]. They had just opened a new office in the […] in the UK. I had to take no pay leave from the […]. So, we came here […] to start a new life. And my husband started work, opened the new office and everything. Because I couldn't work [and] I had no baby, I stayed at home for about three months. I couldn't really stay at home. But luckily, within that three months, I got a job.

> E21: I decided to come here partially to join my husband and partially to kind of get more training here. But at the beginning, it was very much to join my husband who works as a doctor here.

> E62: I follow[ed] my husband who started our business here.

The narratives elucidate the role of family dynamics in the migration decision-making process, illustrating how participants needed to recalibrate their professional lives to align with their spouses' employment opportunities abroad. For example, E21 relocated to accompany her husband, a medical practitioner in the United Kingdom. This decision, while primarily to unite with her spouse, also presented E21 with a chance for professional development. She perceived the relocation as an opportunity to enhance her training in the healthcare sector, potentially shifting the nature of her migration from spousal to economic as she sought to capitalise on professional opportunities in the new environment. On the other hand, E07's migration was propelled by her husband's promotion to an "area manager for the UK", coinciding with his company's expansion. Consequently, E07 had to leave her job, enduring a period of unemployment and adaptation to her new life in the host country. Despite the initial challenges, E07's narrative takes a positive turn as she secures employment, reflecting her resilience and unwillingness to be confined to domestic life. E62's situation differs as her migration alongside her husband was driven by the ambition to grow their business in the United Kingdom. This decision was mutual, highlighting a shared entrepreneurial goal that underpinned their relocation, thus blending personal and professional aspirations in their migration journey. These narratives demonstrate the complexity of spousal migration, where personal sacrifices

are often intertwined with opportunities for personal and professional growth. While these individuals followed their spouses for employment reasons, their experiences in the host country reflect maintaining family unity and pursuing individual career aspirations.

Several participants embarked on their migration journey to accompany their spouses who were pursuing educational opportunities in the United Kingdom, as exemplified by E23 and S02.

> E23: We came over because my husband was doing his MBA.
>
> S02: Follow wife's decision to study in […].

In addition to following spouses for employment opportunities, several participants also relocated as part of a collective family decision to support their spouse's educational ambitions, which, in turn, contributes to the sustainability of their marriage. The data reveals a bidirectional dynamic in spousal support for education: it is not exclusively women following their husbands, as demonstrated by E23 who accompanied her husband for his MBA programme, but also men supporting their wives' educational pursuits, as seen in S02's case where he followed his wife's decision to study abroad. While this study does not focus on analysing gender roles within the context of the thesis due to its scope and the limited data on gender-specific trends, it is observed that a significant proportion of the accompanying spouses or partners are women moving with their male partners. This migration trend emphasises the supportive roles that spouses undertake to foster each other's educational goals, illustrating a dedication to mutual development and the achievement of academic objectives in a marital relationship. By choosing to migrate to the United Kingdom to be alongside their spouses, these individuals exemplify the relationship between personal bonds and educational ambitions, demonstrating how familial relationships can act as a stimulus for and enhance the educational experiences of partners.

Wimberley *et al.* in *Predicting Success of Indonesian Graduate Students in the United States* have suggested that there is greater academic success for the international student when they are accompanied by their spouse/partner as there is an "important form of social support needed to help the student through the hurdles of graduate study" and "the shock of living in an alien cultural environment is virtually eliminated" by the presence of family members (1992: 508). The need for family support is well articulated in the following narrative:

> E49: My brother was studying in […]. I was unhealthy, I was unhappy. And so, I decided to tag along and decided to take the Work/Holiday visa. And so, we were doing backpacking, as well as working at every stage as we stop-and-go. And yeah, that's the reason why I came here.

E49's migration narrative reveals a poignant quest for a healthier and more fulfilling lifestyle, distinct from her experiences in Malaysia. Feeling "unhealthy" and "unhappy" in her home country, she seized the chance to join her brother, who was in the United Kingdom for educational purposes, on a journey that combined "backpacking" and working. This decision to migrate, while influenced by her brother's presence in the United Kingdom, emphasises E49's personal desire for a significant life change. Her narrative suggests that the brother's location served as a facilitator for her migration, offering her a sense of security and familiarity in a foreign land. While it remains speculative whether E49 would have embarked on this journey independently, it is evident that her brother's residence in the United Kingdom provided a compelling motivation to pursue a new chapter abroad. This narrative makes clear the interconnection between personal well-being and familial support in migration decisions, illustrating how the desire for a better lifestyle can be a powerful motivator for relocating, especially when coupled with the opportunity to maintain close family ties.

British nationals, living and working in Malaysia.

The second category under examination pertains to participants who relocated to the United Kingdom to be with their spouses or partners who are British nationals. This group includes individuals like E57, E08, S06, UA06, E53, E43, and E10, who chose to migrate for the sake of maintaining or strengthening their marital or partnership bonds with British citizens.

> E57: The migration thing is 100% due to my wife. She is half Chinese and half Irish. So, a little bit of history… my wife has been living in Malaysia since she was nine. So, I met her back home in Malaysia. So, when we got married, we weren't thinking about moving here. And fortunately, we met her uncle who had a kind of a business in Malaysia… we met a few times. And he encouraged us to move here.

E57's migration narrative reveals nuanced familial influence and personal decisions. Initially, E57 and his British wife, who had spent a significant portion of her life in Malaysia, intended to settle in Malaysia post-marriage. However, their migration trajectory took a pivotal turn following the persuasive encouragement from his wife's uncle, a businessman in Malaysia,

who advocated for their relocation to England. While E57 and his wife had not previously contemplated moving to the United Kingdom, they were swayed by the family member's advice, leading to a life-altering decision to migrate. E57 reflects on this shift with a sense of gratitude, suggesting that the move, though unplanned, was fortuitous and ultimately beneficial. Conversely, for participants like E08, S06, and UA06, the decision to migrate was more straightforward, driven by a clear preference for establishing their lives in the United Kingdom over Malaysia. Their choices point to the significance of the destination country in their migration decisions, highlighting a deliberate move towards what they perceived as more favourable circumstances or opportunities in the United Kingdom.

> E08: I met my husband … we both decided that England is going to be most important [because] my husband is British. We spoke about like… whether he wanted to come over (to Malaysia) and stuff like that, but then it didn't really work for us because of his job. And... a lot of things that was important to us. And… we finally decided that we're going to move to […]. So, for me, I moved here because of marriage, for my husband.
>
> S06: I came here to be with my partner in Scotland… because my partner is British.
>
> UA06: There was no choice really as my prospective husband (husband now) is from the UK.

E08's migration to England, alongside her British husband, was primarily motivated by the couple's belief that residing in England was paramount for their relationship and his career. The couple assessed that his employment prospects in England were more conducive to their life together and reflected a mutual commitment to ensuring their marital stability and unity. E08 articulates her move as being centred around her marriage, highlighting the profound influence of her relationship on her decision to relocate. In a similar vein, S06 and UA06 also made the definitive choice to move to the United Kingdom to be with their British partners, underlining a sense of inevitability in their decision-making process. UA06's remark that "there was no choice" of living elsewhere reflects a strong commitment to their relationships, suggesting that their partners' nationalities and circumstances in the United Kingdom significantly shaped their migration paths. These narratives illustrate how personal relationships and practical considerations, such as employment and the desire for marital unity, can profoundly influence individuals' migration decisions.

Another determining factor is the reality of unemployment faced by British nationals in Malaysia, as elucidated by E53 and E43.

> E53: I first came to England in 1999 on a tourist visa to stay with my then boyfriend (now husband) to get to know him better. We got married back in Malaysia in 2000 and then returned to England as he had no rights to live and work in Malaysia. If he had, we might have stayed in Malaysia. But I am now glad that we didn't with all the corruption and unrest in the country the last 10 years or so.
>
> E43: So, the reason for my migration to the UK is simply because my husband was a British citizen, and doesn't have the right to live anywhere else in the world. So, it's just a little bit easier for me to obtain my residency, or as they call it here Indefinite Leave to Remain in the UK.

E53 and E43 relocated to the United Kingdom because their spouses, who are British citizens, faced significant challenges in obtaining the right to live and work in Malaysia. E53 highlighted that her spouse "had no rights to live and work in Malaysia", a sentiment echoed by E43, who noted that her partner could not work "anywhere else in the world". According to the Immigration Department of Malaysia's guidelines, a foreign national must secure an employment offer in Malaysia before entering the country, as the employer needs to apply for a work permit or visa on the individual's behalf. This policy implies that without a job offer, foreign nationals cannot work in Malaysia, which was a crucial factor for E53 and her husband's decision to leave. They might have considered staying in Malaysia if not for these stringent immigration rules. E43's migration was influenced by the relative ease of obtaining residency or Indefinite Leave to Remain (ILR) in the United Kingdom, suggesting a more straightforward process for Malaysians moving to there than for British nationals seeking employment in Malaysia. This disparity in employment rights and immigration policies significantly influenced their decision to migrate. Additionally, E53's satisfaction with the move is reinforced by her desire to escape the corruption and unrest in Malaysia over the past decade, further justifying their decision to relocate.

For some participants, migration was based on family decision-making that involved the education and health of their offspring, as articulated by E10.

> E10: Married to an Englishman here from […]. So, we got married in Malaysia. And when we got our son, my other half decided to come back to England for my son's education. It was generally for his education and for his health purposes, because we thought that he might get a better education.

Their "son's education" and "health purposes" were an impetus for their move to England (E10). E10 and her husband's decision to apply for migration and settlement in England for E10 and their son was made specifically so that their son could benefit from and "get a better education", connoting a preference for a British education over a Malaysian one. This decision was informed by their desire to capitalise on migration for their child's future in terms of education and healthcare. This case exemplifies how personal and family considerations can significantly influence decisions to migrate, especially when such decisions involve moving to a partner's native country. It gives emphasis to the depth of commitment and willingness to make personal sacrifices and adjustments that are inherent in maintaining bi-national relationships. By opting to move to the United Kingdom, these individuals demonstrate a profound dedication to their relationships and a readiness to navigate the complexities of cultural integration and adaptation. Such migration stories are invaluable for understanding how bi-national couples manage personal relationships and cross-cultural experiences, while exploring cultural integration and adaptation within the context of transnational mobility. This narrative outlines the profound impact of interpersonal relationships on migration decisions and the lengths to which individuals will go to forge a better future for their families, particularly when it involves integrating into a new cultural and social environment.

European nationals, living and working in the United Kingdom

The third and last category I will delve into involves participants who migrated to join their spouses or partners, who are European nationals, in the United Kingdom. These participants were residing in and employed in a different country prior to their move to the United Kingdom. For instance, E68, who was working in Dubai, met her Portuguese husband there. Together, they made a mutual decision to relocate to England, as E68 recounts:

> E68: I was flying with […]. And because, well… I suppose I take that as a phase of life because obviously, I was flying, and it's not really suited for when you're married. So, I came here because my husband works here as well. So that's the reason why I moved. He's Portuguese and we met in Dubai, and he came here first. So, a year later I joined him. I suppose it's

> easier because obviously at the time they have the spouse visa. And obviously, he's Portuguese. For him, it's a bit difficult to get a job in Malaysia, for example. So, it's easier for me to come here instead. So that's why we chose […]. Also, because there's more opportunities here as well.

This narrative informs the practical considerations that led two non-British nationals to choose the United Kingdom as their new home, aiming to live together and secure employment rights. While the reasons for not staying in Dubai are not explicitly mentioned, E68 perceives the United Kingdom as offering more opportunities compared to Dubai. In Dubai, like in Malaysia, an employer must sponsor the foreign employee, taking on the responsibility of applying for their work permit and residency visa, as mandated by the United Arab Emirates' government. This requirement might have influenced their decision to leave Dubai. Moreover, relocating to Malaysia was not a viable option due to the anticipated challenges her Portuguese husband would face in finding employment there. The United Kingdom, on the other hand, seemed more accessible particularly because they could avail themselves of the spouse visa at that time. E68's migration was motivated not only by the desire to unite with her spouse but also by the prospect of better employment opportunities in the United Kingdom. This narrative denotes the various reasons behind migration decisions, where personal relationships intertwine with economic and regulatory factors, and the strategic choices couples make to optimise their living and working conditions.

In this section, the migration decisions of the participants in my research are interpreted as reactions to significant shifts in their life trajectories, compelling them towards migration. These decisions are profoundly rooted in the concept of the family unit, emphasising their roles as partners, siblings, and parents to their offspring. Viewed from this perspective, their migration choices are seen as family-founded responses to different "phase[s] of life" (E68), shaped by evolving circumstances, opportunities, and even limitations. The pull factors behind these migrations encompass a variety of aspects. These include the pursuit of better education and employment opportunities, the allure of higher income and additional benefits, the experience of different work environments and cultures, the desire to explore new countries and cultures, and access to superior healthcare services. However, these benefits often come at the cost of leaving and uprooting their current situation, family members, and established careers. These findings are in tandem with Luthra and Platt's research on the Pakistani diaspora in the United Kingdom: "The current Pakistani migrant stock thus represents all the major forms of migration flows (except for asylum): labor migrants, family reunification, and, with a

large escalation in the latest phase, student migration" (2017: 227). This nuanced perspective delineates the complexity of migration decisions, illustrating how they are not merely individual choices but are deeply interwoven with the migrants' commitment to their family's well-being and future prospects.

4.3.3. Employment

In this section, I intend to explore employment migration as a reason why some of my Malaysian participants emigrated from Malaysia to the United Kingdom. 13% of the participants account for this phenomenon. A common thread among these participants is their receipt of tertiary education in Malaysia, the United Kingdom, or other English-speaking countries where the medium of instruction is English. This educational background potentially opens up broader employment prospects in English-speaking nations, including the United Kingdom. There is a noticeable trend among fresh graduates to remain in the country where they received their higher education, often encouraged by their parents, with the aim of securing better job opportunities. As discussed in section 2.2.5, the World Bank (2011) estimated that about 54.5% of Malaysian students remained abroad after completing their tertiary education, with 72% citing improved employment prospects as a primary reason for staying overseas. Within my study, three participants chose to remain in the United Kingdom post-graduation, two stayed in New Zealand and Australia where they completed their studies, and four, including E63, E17, E54, and E66, moved to the United Kingdom for employment after being educated in Malaysia. E63 specifically mentions that her move was "for [a] job" following the completion of her entire education in Malaysia, culminating in a Ph.D. This section will further investigate employment migration and its implications for the personal and professional lives of these individuals.

> E63: I migrated for job. So, I did all my education in Malaysia, up to my Ph.D. in Malaysia in 2016. And as soon as I got my Ph.D., I moved to the UK. For my first job and subsequent jobs have been in the UK. I actually did an internship in Switzerland for about three months in […], and then I came to realise how the working culture is outside of Malaysia, especially in science. And had a realisation that in science, unfortunately, I can't really do a lot if I were to remain in Malaysia. So, then there were a few countries in my mind, including well, primarily Switzerland at the time, but I also knew that from a short visit to London for a long weekend, while in Switzerland, that I kind of found that home in the UK, or in […] in particular, because you can sort of become self-sufficient without having to rely on a lot of things. You know, there's the transport, in terms of signage, everything is in English, that is a big help. Because in Switzerland, it's mostly in German language. Which, you know, if you do migrate to a country, you would learn a language

> there anyway. But English already makes your life a little bit easier. And so that sort of induced my interest. And, the UK have a lot of good quality high education institutes that offer good projects and good money, grants wise and able to support your project. So, then I started to look at various different countries, applied to various different countries, but I kept getting offers from institutions in the UK, so I ended up choosing the UK.

E63, a Malaysian scientist, experienced a pivotal moment of realisation regarding the limitations she faced in her home country's scientific community. She recognised that her career prospects in science would be significantly constrained if she remained in Malaysia. This realisation propelled her decision to migrate to the United Kingdom, where the working culture and opportunities in her field appeared more promising. Language played a crucial role in her choice; she compared her options and noted that in Switzerland, for instance, the predominant use of German would pose a challenge for her. In contrast, the United Kingdom's English-speaking environment would facilitate her daily life, from using public transport to understanding signage, enhancing her independence. More critically, E63 was drawn to the United Kingdom because of the attractive professional prospects it offered. She was enticed by the availability of well-funded projects, substantial financial incentives, and grants, which were instrumental in supporting her research undertakings. Despite considering various countries, the continuous flow of job offers from British institutions solidified her decision to choose the United Kingdom as her new base. The move was significantly motivated by the prospect of accessing better financial support for her scientific work, a stark contrast to the limited resources available in Malaysia. E63 viewed British institutions as providers of high-quality education and research opportunities, which ultimately influenced her migration decision, affirming the importance of professional advancement and the pursuit of excellence in her field.

E17, who is a medical doctor and completed his internship in Malaysia, found it imperative to relocate to the United Kingdom for employment opportunities that promised a more fulfilling career and an enhanced quality of life. His decision was driven by the prospect of achieving greater professional growth and securing a lifestyle that aligns with his aspirations for success and well-being.

> E17: I graduated as a medical doctor in […] 2017 and completed my 2-year internship in Malaysia prior to moving to the UK. I have been working as a doctor in the […] since […] 2019. I moved for better overall quality of life

> and career advancement. Plus, it's more a transparent and straightforward process for medical doctors.

What is more, E17 notes that the process for medical doctors to establish their careers in the United Kingdom is more "explicit, transparent, and straightforward" compared to Malaysia. This perspective aligns with E63's experience in the field of science, suggesting a broader trend where the United Kingdom offers more robust resources and opportunities for career development, particularly in specialised fields like medicine and science. E54, on the other hand, has a different professional focus. His ambition lies in expanding a business within the United Kingdom. This entrepreneurial drive further illustrates the diverse reasons why individuals from Malaysia are drawn to the United Kingdom not just for employment opportunities but also for the potential to grow businesses and pursue varied career paths in a more supportive and resource-rich environment.

> E54: I started doing my business here in the UK. When I was organising events in London for the past eight years, people asked me why not organise in Australia or even in Europe. Because we are doing these events that is self-sustainable and not supported by government or anything, I can't move here or there because once you move into another country, logistically you don't understand this, and the cost too. So, that's why I'm focusing on the UK… I understand the system, the local environment and all that because this plays a very important role. Also, another reason I came into the UK is because of my kids… to help them in their career and studies.

E54's preference for expanding his business in the United Kingdom is deeply rooted in his familiarity with the country's systems and local environment, which he considers crucial for his success. Despite opportunities to organise events in Australia or Europe, E54 finds the idea of relocating logistically challenging, especially since his events focus on promoting self-sustainable businesses that do not receive government support. This adds a layer of complexity in unfamiliar settings where he might not grasp the logistical nuances as well as he does in the United Kingdom. Moreover, the decision to centre his business expansion in the United Kingdom is intertwined with his family considerations. With his children residing in the same country, E54 sees a strategic advantage in staying in the United Kingdom to support their careers and education. This dual-focus approach highlights E54's strategic planning, where he aligns his professional ambitions with his family commitments, aiming to create a supportive

environment for both his business and his children's future prospects—a win-win situation. 54's narrative marks the multiple reasons behind migration decisions, where personal, familial, and professional factors converge to guide the choice of destination for career and family development.

Family encouragement and support often play a major role in the decision to migrate, as discussed in section 4.3.2. This influence is vividly illustrated in E66's narrative, demonstrating the significant impact that familial backing can have on such life-changing decisions.

> E66: Before I came to the UK, I was working as a receptionist in one of the first private hospital in […]. It was my second job after leaving secondary school. My only sister, who came to England to study nursing way back in the early 1970's insisted I should come to England to make a better living for myself. My late father agreed my future would be more promising too. So, I was invited by family members to join them for a better future, [and there] was no need to think of another country.

Prior to relocating to the United Kingdom, E66 worked as a receptionist at a private hospital in Malaysia. Her decision to relocate was significantly influenced by her only sister, who had moved to England in the early 1970s to study nursing. Her sister strongly encouraged E66 to join her in England, promising a better standard of living. This suggestion was supported by their late father, who also believed that E66's future would be more promising in England. Yielding to her family's encouragement, E66 accepted the invitation to move, motivated by the unanimous belief in a brighter future in the United Kingdom—a decision reinforced by the presence of supportive family members already in the country. Once again, the powerful role of family in migration decisions highlights how the prospect of improved quality of life and opportunities in the host country can drive such significant life changes.

For E26, S04, and UA01, their decision to migrate to the United Kingdom for employment was greatly influenced by their prior experiences in the country as students. Having received a British education, they were already familiar with the culture, lifestyle, and opportunities available in the United Kingdom, which encouraged them to return for professional pursuits. This familiarity and positive association with the United Kingdom, cultivated during their time as students, played a crucial role in their choice to seek employment and build their careers in a country where they had already laid foundational experiences and connections.

> E26: I did my bachelor's degree in [the UK] and then when I went back home, and I got a job with […]. And there was another company called […], also part of […]. So, they specifically wanted someone with a British degree, like the UK. They wanted someone with that background. And that's how I applied for the job, and I got it. After two years I was made redundant… they decided to close the regional office. I had the opportunity to come to UK to work, either to go to […] in Singapore, or to go to UK with […]. And I chose UK because I was there before in 96. So, I kind of like knew what the lifestyle was like and all that. So, I decided to come to the UK.

Having a British degree was a criterion in E26's company, highlighting the value placed on a British degree within her professional field. Her company specifically sought candidates with British educational credentials, which not only facilitated her initial employment in Malaysia but also paved the way for her subsequent opportunity to work in the United Kingdom. This requirement stresses the recognition and esteem attached to a British education in her industry, providing her with the leverage to choose between potential job offers in Singapore or the United Kingdom. E26's decision to migrate to the United Kingdom for work was influenced by several factors: her previous experience living in the country as a student, the demand for her British degree which led to a concrete employment offer, and her familiarity with the United Kingdom's lifestyle, having lived there before. This combination of academic credentials, professional opportunity, and personal experience made the United Kingdom an attractive destination for her. Similarly, S04 and UA01's decisions were also informed by their own experiences and the perceived advantages of having a British educational background, illustrating how prior exposure and qualifications can significantly shape migration choices for employment.

> S04: [Having] studied here before, I had offers from other countries (Australia and New Zealand), but the choice was more on the company I accepted the offer [from], not the country.
>
> UA01: [I came] for work. It has the same system, and the language is familiar.

S04 and UA01's narratives attest to the pattern that previous educational experiences in the United Kingdom significantly influence decisions to pursue employment migration there. S04 emphasises that her decision was driven by the job offer itself rather than the destination

country, even though she received proposals from other nations like Australia and New Zealand. This epitomises the importance of the employment opportunity in her decision-making process, with the country of destination being a secondary consideration. UA01's narrative points out the advantages of a familiar system and language, underlining the role of English proficiency and comfort with the system—traits often acquired during their education in the United Kingdom—in their decision to migrate there for work.

The preference for English-speaking countries among participants like S04, who had job offers from multiple countries, suggests a tendency to gravitate toward environments where language barriers are minimal. This inclination also appears in the choices of E19 and E44, who, having been educated in English-speaking settings, opted for the United Kingdom as their destination for employment migration. These narratives collectively illustrate how educational background, language familiarity, and the specifics of job offers collectively shape the migration decisions of individuals seeking employment abroad.

> E19: I went to Australia to study for about three years. I've always felt the experience of moving to Australia to study had opened up my eyes to the world. So naturally, I thought, okay, there's actually a few things out there in the world, and I like to see it. So, I was an assessed consultant back in […] for a local partner for three or four years. Then there were opportunities in Dubai. Because my wife actually used to work with Singapore Airlines, she got recruited by Emirates, and we moved to Dubai. […]. So, once I established myself, then we decided that we wanted to start a family, and Dubai was not exactly conducive for us to start a family. So, we were looking for opportunities in the US and the UK. I wasn't too drawn to the US, for certain reasons like marketing, selling and everything else which is quite apparent in the US. And on top of that, there's always the gun laws. It wasn't so relaxed there. So then, I got headhunted by a recruiter for consultancy in the UK. And it was like, we really like your profile, would you like to have a chat with? So, I did. I went through about two interviews. And then before I know it, they were in the midst of applying for my visa, my work permit. Then we moved to the UK, and here I am 13 years later.

> E44: After I finished my Ph.D. in New Zealand, I applied to many countries but then I didn't get a job. Then I got a job in Australia in university, in

> Vietnam, then in UAE. After a few years in the UAE, I thought maybe it's time for me to move on because working in the UAE, they don't give you any residency, you're always on a two-year contract. So, I was looking for a job that is more permanent, then I started to try America, the UK and of course, Malaysia but not very attractive in Malaysia with the currency and the exchange rate. Then I got a few interviews in the UK, so I thought okay that in the end I took this job. So, I'm okay coming here, I felt here it's easy for me to adapt to the UK environment compared to the UAE or compared to Vietnam. I find UK is more suitable if I really want to live here for long term. I have friends working in the UK, and the environment, the driving and things are similar to Malaysia, I would say.

According to Susan Ossman in *Moving Matters: Paths of Serial Migration* (2013), a "serial migrant" is an individual who has migrated multiple times and generally identifies with more than two places. This concept challenges traditional notions of migration and transnationalism. Serial migrants' experiences are shaped by their repeated migrations, personal circumstances, and the countries they migrate to. In the context of this study, the narratives of E19 and E44 act as prime examples of serial migrants. E19's education in Australia served as a pivotal experience, broadening his horizons and fuelling his desire to explore opportunities globally. This newfound perspective led him to seek employment internationally, initially in the United Arab Emirates and later in the United Kingdom. Notably, E19's decision to settle in the United Kingdom was influenced by his desire to start a family, which he felt Dubai was not well-suited for. Moreover, his choice between the United States and the United Kingdom was swayed by his concerns about the former's marketing practices and gun laws, demonstrating how personal values and societal factors can influence migration decisions. E44's journey, following her Ph.D. in New Zealand, involved exploring job opportunities in various countries, including Australia, Vietnam, and the United Arab Emirates. Her experience in the UAE, where residency was not offered and employment was contingent on renewable two-year contracts, did not align with her desire for stability and permanence. Additionally, the lack of attractive opportunities in Malaysia, exacerbated by financial considerations like currency and exchange rates, prompted her to look abroad. Both E19 and E44's narratives underscore how initial international exposure can catalyse a broader search for opportunities and a life abroad, driven by a combination of personal aspirations, lifestyle preferences, and professional considerations. Their experiences reflect a common theme among individuals who, having been exposed to

diverse cultures and environments, come to seek more favourable conditions elsewhere, often in contrast to their home country.

In this section, the motivations behind the migration of the participants in my research to the United Kingdom for employment uncover a set of drivers that extend beyond mere job acquisition. Central to their decision is the pursuit of enhanced employment prospects and career advancement, accentuated by a prevailing belief that such opportunities are scarce or less favourable in Malaysia. This perception is not just about the availability of jobs but also about the quality and scope of career development that the United Kingdom is perceived to offer. For some participants, the economic benefits, such as the allure of a stronger currency and the potential for business growth, serve as significant incentives. The United Kingdom's economic environment is seen as conducive to fostering entrepreneurial ventures and offering financial stability and growth, which is particularly appealing for those looking to establish or expand a business. Additionally, familial considerations play a crucial role in these migration decisions. Participants like E66 and others emphasise the desire to provide "a better future" for their families, particularly in terms of supporting their children's education and career prospects. The United Kingdom is viewed as a place where their children can access superior educational opportunities and thrive professionally, which, in turn, motivates parents to migrate to support and be close to their family. The comfort of familiarity and previous positive experiences abroad also influence these decisions. Participants who have previously studied or lived in English-speaking countries, especially the United Kingdom, find the transition smoother and the prospect of living and working there more appealing. The familiarity with the language and the system reduces the perceived barriers to integration and adaptation, making the United Kingdom a preferred destination over other potential options. Moreover, the decision to migrate is seen as a proactive strategy to tap into opportunities that are perceived to be limited or non-existent in Malaysia. This proactive approach reflects a broader trend whereby individuals are increasingly willing to relocate to optimise their professional growth, economic stability, and family well-being, highlighting the evolving state of employment migration in the context of global mobility.

4.3.4. Personal and lifestyle factors

This section delves into the narratives of two participants who migrated to the United Kingdom, driven by the pursuit of new personal experiences and the quest for a lifestyle that resonates with their aspirations.

> E37: Well, I just wanted to come over to what life was like… to experience a different type of life. Because my case is a bit, I guess, rather unusual compared to most Malaysians because I was actually born here to Malaysian parents. So, because of that I have a British birth certificate which allows me to something called the right of abode, which pretty much means like I can stay here with no limitations, and I pretty much have rights like any citizen here. So yeah, that's how I came over… decided to come over and see what life was like. UK wasn't my first choice… it was somewhere else. But then after giving it some thought it was pretty much like a no-brainer because I didn't need a visa like a lot of people. […] I didn't need that with my British birth cert. I'm pretty much like a British citizen except the fact that I hold a Malaysian passport. So, that made me decide to come here.

> E64: I would say one of the first things was mainly due to my sexuality. I am a gay man; I don't have any qualms about telling people that I am gay. I knew I was gay from a very young age. And I could see that there was a lot of struggles going on in Malaysia, especially within the LGBTQ population, about how we are marginalised, not even recognised, and have no rights or anything like that. And I probably had in my head that I was not going to live in Malaysia. And I was going to take the first opportunity that I got to leave. […] And I like to travel and see more different cultures. And I've seen so that's one of the reasons why I've also come up to the UK because it was just such an eye opener for me. Also, it was a no-brainer for me to actually come up to the UK because I am part English. So, I was able to actually come through ancestry.

E37's decision to move to the United Kingdom was straightforward due to her British birthright, being born in the country to Malaysian parents. This status granted her the right of abode, allowing her to live in the United Kingdom without any restrictions and enjoy the same rights as any British citizen. E64 also found the decision to move easy, attributed to his partial

English ancestry. Both E37 and E64 leveraged their unique positions to migrate to the United Kingdom, sidestepping the visa complexities faced by many others. This facilitated their desire to immerse themselves in a different lifestyle and culture. Unlike participants who migrated for educational, employment, or familial reasons, E37 and E64 sought a distinct life experience that the United Kingdom promised. E64, in particular, sought refuge from the marginalisation he faced in Malaysia as a "gay man". The sociocultural environment in Malaysia, especially concerning LGBTQ rights, pushed him to emigrate at the first opportunity. For both E37 and E64, migrating was "a no-brainer", enabled by their right of abode, which allowed them to pursue lifestyles in the United Kingdom that might have been unattainable or challenging in Malaysia. Their narratives give prominence to how legal entitlements can significantly ease the migration process, enabling individuals to seek personal growth and freedom in a more accepting environment.

4.3.5. Chapter summary

As discussed in this section, there have been several determinants regarding the reasons why Malaysians leave the country. Emigrating from one's birth country to another in the hope of a better future and possibilities through educational, economic and lifestyle opportunities has become part of the Malaysian immigrants' narrative. In recent years, many Malaysians who constitute the non-*Bumiputeras* have left Malaysia because of limited opportunities in public tertiary educational institutions and employment, particularly in the government sectors. Based on my observation of the participants' narratives, they did not only leave due to a lack of equal opportunities in terms of education, wages and business prospects, but on a deeper level, I felt there was a level of frustration with the strict bureaucratic and unresponsive government system, restrictions on freedom in personal lifestyle, ethnocentrically biased policies, and rigid dichotomous policies on religion. Thus, according to the World Bank Report (2011) on the Malaysian Economic Monitor, Malaysians left in search of quality education, better wages, advancement in their profession, social injustice, politics, safety and security, and lifestyle—causes for the Malaysian brain drain (see 2.2.6).

I have selected participants' excerpts that are pertinent to factors that led to their emigration to the United Kingdom. Although similarities in their narratives are apparent, differences are equally noted. Similar to Luthra and Platt's research on the Pakistani diaspora in the United Kingdom (2017), I discovered that while there were many aspects to be considered for migration, the most predominant aspect was attributable to the family's influence. Whether it was the family's own lived experiences abroad involving education and/or employment, the family's desire for their offspring to be educated abroad, or reunification with family, the opportunity to capitalise on "better overall quality of life and career advancement" (E17) for their family members has served as the impetus for emigration from their birth country. These findings are consistent with those of Ho (2011) on the Singaporean diaspora in the United Kingdom and O'Connor (2016) on the Indian diaspora in the United Kingdom. As I have previously discussed in section 3.3.3, and will elaborate on in sections 5.2.2 and 5.3.3, many participants indicated that the existence of an established Malaysian community significantly influenced their choice to move to the United Kingdom. This observation parallels the migration research findings of Phillimore *et al.* (2021) on Japan and the United Kingdom. Aligning with the World Bank (2011), some participants have expressed the limited opportunities in education and career prospects due to government policies on the employment market; others have expressed their aspiration for career

advancement based on meritocracy, while others long for the benefit of greater foreign currencies to live comfortably. With such criteria and the passage of time, their migration has transformed into a permanent settlement.

With insufficient research on how Malaysian immigrants manage immigration, settlement, and a sense of belonging, there is inadequate knowledge about how these processes impact their integration into the host society. When expanding on the research on immigrant development, it is worth considering their various backgrounds, multidimensional identities and lived experiences which have moulded them in ways that differ from the dominant culture of the host society. The Malaysian diaspora in the United Kingdom seems to be among the unheard voices, and in order to progress in significant ways, by extension, to be heard and included in the host society, a profound understanding of their cultural background is necessary, particularly for these participants who form the first-generation Malaysian immigrants and who thus have deep ethnic and cultural customs and traditions. Having discussed their identity transformation after migration, one of the most vital aspects of that transformation seems to be linked to their hard work and success in which they have invested to achieve their integration and socioeconomic status. Brown's (2006) research on the Indian subcontinent reverberates with my point, suggesting that migrants are willing to endure extreme hardships and unfamiliar situations in their pursuit of newfound prosperity and status. This part will be discussed in detail in Chapter 4.4 and Part 5.

As exhibited in this research, decisions to emigrate for future goals figure prominently amongst Malaysians as acquiring an international tertiary education reflects a momentous achievement. Similar findings (Cheung *et al.*, 2016; Chen & Bang, 2020; Kuah *et al.*, 2021) have found that East Asian immigrants have strong beliefs in success in higher education, and the importance they place on this success for future employment. My research participants have also articulated that an international tertiary education setting is the gateway to a 'better future', reinforcing the impression that the education acquired from the United Kingdom is greater than that of their birth country. As discussed previously, a keen interest in tertiary education is often powered by the support and encouragement of family, who foresee a 'better future' for postgraduates in securing employment in the new host country of residence. While this is a vision for a brighter future by way of setting goals for success, migrating to an environment that remains by and large foreign does not come without its challenges. The importance of social mobility gains suggested by the discourse of a 'better future' has an impact on how these immigrants construct their identity as members of a minority group in a multicultural setting.

Based on historical context, British colonialism has played a major role in social mobility discourses within the Malaysian socioeconomic landscape, and seeking “quality education”, “better employment opportunities” and “better lifestyle” has been the ultimate goal in propelling themselves towards leading successful and satisfying lives.

Having explored the determinants of social mobility to the United Kingdom, it becomes clear that their aspirations for a ‘better future’ are deeply embedded within the broader narrative of a multicultural context. This narrative is significantly shaped by historical legacies, notably British colonialism, which has left an indelible mark on Malaysia's socioeconomic fabric. As we transition from understanding these broader determinants to focusing on why the United Kingdom specifically emerges as the preferred destination for these immigrants, it is crucial to delve into the facilitating factors that make this nation an attractive option. The forthcoming chapter will explore the role of the English language, the intricacies of immigration and visa policies, and the specific migration aspirations that draw Malaysian immigrants to the United Kingdom, further unravelling the layers of this complex migratory phenomenon.

4.4. Facilitating factors for the United Kingdom as the preferred host country

Emigrating to a more developed country seems to be a trademark among the participants within the paradigm of social mobility and the discourse of a "better future". What is more, as I have previously established, the tendency for Malaysians to migrate to an English-speaking country has been greater than to non-English-speaking counterparts. The discourse of a better future has been associated with positive views of the United Kingdom and its reputation for democracy, justice, and freedom as the main stimuli for immigrants, particularly when these ideals are compromised by biased policies in the countries from which immigrants originate. However, perhaps there is also comparatively limited knowledge about life in the United Kingdom's neighbouring countries, and thus there is less of a pull factor for immigrants. The history of migration to the United Kingdom is most likely the main contributor to recent migrant inflows.

Malaysia has been one of the most resilient countries in Southeast Asia in maintaining its cultural, historical, and immigration ties with the United Kingdom. The reason behind these strong links and their longevity is in part due to Malaysia's membership in the Commonwealth of Nations, resulting in a range of advantages that the membership offers. One such advantage of being a Commonwealth member is the visa-free short-term stays in the United Kingdom. Additionally, as a member of the Commonwealth, Malaysians are eligible to apply for a specific type of visa called the UK Ancestry visa, which allows holders to settle on a permanent basis in the United Kingdom upon showing proof of having one or more British grandparents. There are other types of visas for migration to the United Kingdom available to Malaysians who meet the requirements, such as Family visas, Work visas, and Student visas. These types of visas will be illustrated in detail in section 4.4.2.

The longstanding relationship between the United Kingdom and Malaysia has developed significantly, establishing numerous ties and networks and facilitating migration for education, employment, and lifestyle through such support systems. As reported by UNESCO (2013), the education pathway has been a significant reason for international migration with the United Kingdom hosting the second highest number of international students behind the United States of America. As discussed in section 4.3.1, Malaysian students constitute one of the largest international student populations in the United Kingdom, owing to remnants of colonial legacy of culture, education, and language. The universality of English as a second language around the globe is arguably an important aspect of people's decision-making in opting for the United

Kingdom as a migratory destination. The English language has been a vital part of ensuring the continuity of the relationships between nations and can be considered as one of the strongest influences on the emigration decision. In the subsequent sections, I examine participants' responses to the inquiry regarding the role of language in their decision to migrate to the United Kingdom. This examination includes an exploration of how their English language proficiency, acquired through their education, influenced their choice. I also probe whether they would have considered relocating to a non-English speaking country and the extent to which language barriers factored into their migration decisions I discuss how language has played a major role (or not for some) in the participants' negotiation of the decision to leave Malaysia for the United Kingdom. While these decisions were primarily categorised as main themes in the emigration narratives by a desire for "better education", "better opportunities", "better lifestyle" and "better future", most participants have also articulated that these factors have been interlinked with language and served as a major source of influence. The participants fervently believed that the English language was an aspect to consider, and migrating to the United Kingdom was favourable for achieving a 'better future'.

4.4.1. English language

In a broad sense, the perception of the British way of life as being regarded as highly valuable and prestigious is interlinked with the Britain's colonial history, the Commonwealth connection, and a similar system of infrastructure, as previously discussed. The English language is an additional but essential factor when considering migration for most participants, as Mukherjee and David posit in *Introduction: Language policies at variance with language use in multilingual Malaysia*:

> Globalisation has encouraged many Malaysians to focus on the English language; indeed, the position of English as an international language has resulted in English and not Bahasa Malaysia being used as the principal language of communication, especially in the urban areas and among middle and upper class Malaysians, especially non-Malays. (2011: 21)

From my qualitative interviews, this aspect emerged as one of the main questions. The aim of this question was to find out if language had a determining impact on their emigration decision. The narratives that follow clearly illustrate how the English language has served as a significant catalyst, influencing their decision to pursue education in the United Kingdom. This is largely attributed to their early exposure to and acquisition of English during their school years, which played a foundational role in shaping their educational paths.

> S01: And particularly this is because it's obviously Malaysia. There's so much of influence from the British being from like, in a Commonwealth country and a former British colony. So, I think that was more of an attraction, obviously education wise they say, you know… the UK provide quality education. So that was another factor.

> E04: We learn British English in schools and have a similar education system, so it only made sense to go where it was familiar. And English being quite a strong language for me, I decided on picking a country that spoke English. It would have been quite difficult to learn another language and do my Uni studies.

> E67: So, initially when I was applying for the scholarship, I put the UK as number one, the US number as two and Germany number as three. I was awarded Germany and I went there. […] I struggled a bit at Uni because

everything was in German, and […] I didn't get good results and the language struggle drove me out. The UK was the next best destination in Europe, and I was able to do some credit transfer and managed to move to the UK. […] And I was fortunate enough at that point, to be awarded a scholarship to do a Ph.D. So basically, that Ph.D. led me to stay on for another three years in the UK. […] if you ask me why the UK, I think when we were growing up as Malaysians and in terms of heritage and studying abroad, it's always the UK and then maybe Australia, and the US. So, I think that's why the UK was my preferred destination.

E12: I think it's mainly to do with the fact that I was studying GCSE which is Cambridge. And I think Malaysia, and Sabah being former British colony has something to do with it.

E24: Because when I was at home (Malaysia) we were doing senior Cambridge, you know, like our education is connected to England. […] See, when I went to school, our school was run by the convent sisters. They teach more about England; they were from here and Ireland. So, always in our primary school and secondary school, it was more about English language, nothing to do with Malay.

E02: Being a Malaysian we speak English. And I suppose I came in 1987 when in Malaysia, English was very much part of the curriculum. And so, I didn't have an issue. In fact, I was told by the English that my English was better than theirs. So, it was just one of those things that we just, you know, integration with language, so it was never a problem.

E69: Most of the world speaks English. But compared to Europe where we could have gone as well, language would have been a contributing factor, obviously. Although I think it's also to do with the education system […] because I've got a British degree and worthwhile for us to come to the UK because I could easily get a job… it's much easier. I wouldn't have had to learn another language.

The narratives above demonstrate a link between education migration, Malaysia being a "former British colony" (S01 and E12), and English language proficiency. In *Soft Power: The*

New Great Game, Winder states that "the British Council has estimated that the 'long term benefit' of the world adopting English as its second language is […] a way of saying that it is of tremendous importance" (2020: 49). The ease in English language exhibits great importance for these participants as English is a widely spoken language in Malaysia and is the second language taught in their public schools. This familiarity with English greatly influenced their educational choices. For instance, one participant (E04) highlighted the significance of English in Malaysian education, noting that they were taught British English in schools. Another (E24) mentioned the connection between their education system and England, stating, "we were doing senior Cambridge […] like our education is connected to England". Similarly, E02 emphasised the integral role of English in their curriculum. The fear of having to navigate a new language was a significant concern for these participants. E04 shared that the proficiency in English was a decisive factor in choosing an English-speaking country for higher education, to avoid the challenges of learning a new language while studying. This sentiment was echoed by E67, who initially faced difficulties at a German university due to the language barrier, which adversely affected his academic performance. The struggle with the German language was so pronounced that it compelled him to transfer to a university in the United Kingdom, where he could study in English, thereby alleviating the language-related challenges and facilitating a smoother educational journey.

From the above narratives, a significant connection between the English language and British colonialism was perceived by the participants through the reiteration of such notions: "Commonwealth, former British colony", "British English in schools and have a similar education system", "heritage and studying abroad, it's always the UK", "English was very much part of the curriculum", "Most of the world speaks English". They acknowledge the influence of British colonial history on their engagement with the English language, reflecting Malaysia's past as a British colony and a member of the Commonwealth. One participant (S01) explicitly links the prevalence of English in Malaysia to its historical ties with Britain, noting the country's status as a former British colony and a Commonwealth nation. Another participant (E67) references the influence of British colonialism on their personal and national heritage, while E12 suggests that Malaysia's, and specifically Sabah's, colonial past plays a role in the prominence of English in their education and culture. These reflections illustrate how the legacy of the British empire extends beyond mere historical or political realms, permeating the educational and linguistic fabric of its former colonies. The participants' experiences reveal how English, propagated through colonial and postcolonial educational

policies, continues to shape their educational choices and opportunities in a globalised context. In effect, the British empire not only impacted the globe through its multifarious constitutional and educational infrastructures but also through the English language, harmonising with McIntyre (1998) and Jackson (2013) as discussed in section 2.2.3. The impact of the spread of the English language is evidenced in postcolonial Malaysia and its citizens. So much so that for many of these participants, the English language is widely spoken in the household and is not only considered a *lingua franca* but also their primary language of communication (see 2.2.1 and 3.3).

> E10: I was born in a family where my mom was a Malay, and my dad was an Indian converted to Muslim. And our first language was English. […] Because my mum was educated in a convent school. So, she speaks English at home with all of us. So, we grew up speaking English at home and then Malay as second language.
>
> E48: I'm not 100% sure if my parents were looking at other countries. But I think they chose the UK maybe mainly for the language as well. My mum's Malaysian, my dad's Swedish, so English was kind of like that neutral ground. And also, I think the thought process was that a UK education, any sort of paperwork when it comes to education, is well recognised across… internationally. So, I think that was sort of the easy choice for them.
>
> UA04: It helped as English has always been my first language. […] I didn't have any difficulties settling in. I've always spoken English (although more American English) so language was not an issue.
>
> E11: English is the language spoken in our family.
>
> E30: Yes. Because I was educated in an international school. My command of Malay wasn't very good. We also spoke English in my home, although my grandparents lived with us and I could understand Cantonese, my actual command of the language is very poor.
>
> E69: And I must admit that my family was very banana. We're not your typical Malaysian Chinese. We were more westernised; we spoke English at home I was growing up. I could not speak Chinese while you extended family

> was in […] could. My parents spoke English at home and friends spoke English.
>
> S08: I mean, definitely language helped because we grew up in the house… my parents could speak Tamil. But my mum insisted that when we were growing up to speak in English in the house because she felt it would be better for education for us, just to have English as a first language. […] And obviously, we learned malay in school and stuff like that. So, you know, decision for higher education was pretty much based on countries where English was the first language. So, the choices would always have been English speaking countries.

These narratives confirm the influence of British colonialism in Malaysia and its dispersion of the English language, as in a household that has a multiethnic and multilinguistic setting, their "spoken language" or "first language" at home is English, perfectly aligning with Holst's, Paikeday's, Kanno's, and Davies's observation of what constitutes a mother tongue or native language (refer to section 2.2.1). Indeed, Paikeday observes:

> [W]hile their children use English exclusively, any communication gap being bridged by the parents using English as a second language and the children having ears trained to follow what is going on between mom and dad though totally unable to talk to them in the mother tongue. (2003: 35)

Paikeday's observation about children using English exclusively, even in households where parents communicate in a different mother tongue, resonates with the experience of E10 and E48, who come from a multilingual household with Tamil, Malay, and Swedish. For them, English emerges as a "neutral ground"—in other words *lingua franca*—in order for a communal communication. The link to British colonial history is further evidenced in E10's account, where she discusses her mother's education at a convent school. This educational background played a crucial role in shaping the family's linguistic practices, with English being the primary language of communication at home. This scenario aligns with Bhabha's concept of the "Third Space" discussed in chapters 3.2 and 3.3, where cultural exchange and negotiation occur, particularly within the context of British colonial discourse. The spread of the English language and Christian ethos in Malaysia, as part of the colonial "civilizing mission", involved establishing English as both a means of communication and a pedagogical tool in Christian educational institutions (Bhabha, 1994), such as convents. E10's mother's experience

exemplifies how this mission influenced the linguistic and cultural landscape of the colonial subjects, impacting subsequent generations and their linguistic choices.

This is not to say that only families that are multiethnic use the English language as a medium of communication; families who are monoethnic appear to speak in English for the most part at home. For instance, participants E30 and E69 shared that their families opted for English at home due to their limited proficiency in Cantonese or other Chinese languages. E69 further elaborated on her family's unique situation, describing their lifestyle as "more westernised" compared to what might be considered typical for Malaysian Chinese families. This reflects a broader trend where English is not merely a remnant of colonial influence but has been integrated into the cultural and linguistic fabric of Malaysia, influencing family dynamics and personal identity across different ethnic groups. The notion of "westernised" is equated with the English language, and by extension, the dominance of English/British culture in her household, as she asserts that her "family was very banana". Jessie Chiang and Anna Yuan, reporters from the *Voices*, RNZ, and the *Black and White* respectively, explain that "banana" is used to describe Chinese, Japanese and Koreans who are "white on the inside but yellow on the outside". In other words, the term embodies a personification that carries a pejorative undertone for Asian ethnic backgrounds who identify as having assimilated/acculturated into majority Western culture as opposed to South Asian/East Asian cultures. In a study conducted by Lee *et al.* in *The English language and its impact on identities of multilingual Malaysian undergraduates* on the English language and its impact on fluent English-speaking Malaysian postgraduate students, it was suggested that "in the multicultural context of Malaysian society where English is associated with 'Westernization'", the effect of English seems to dominate how Malaysians "perceive themselves and are perceived in society" (2010: 97). Associating this theory with E69's Western-oriented background, English was the prevalent language in her household, used not just for communication "at home" but also with "friends", influencing her social interactions.

Another reason for English's dominance as the primary language in a household, even amidst the presence of other languages, is the strategic anticipation of future educational pursuits. S08's narrative reveals a deliberate choice made by her mother to prioritise English at home, despite the family's fluency in Tamil and Malay. This decision was driven by a forward-looking approach to align with educational systems in English-speaking countries. The mother's insistence on using English as the "first language" was a strategic move to facilitate access to higher education in countries where English is the predominant language of

instruction. Consequently, S08 was brought up with a clear understanding that her educational opportunities would predominantly lie in English-speaking environments, reflecting a purposeful family strategy to navigate the global educational landscape. The English language is rooted in Malaysia's colonial history and the prominence of the language in the nation. Lee *et al.* term English as an "'inherited' language" and a "'legacy' of the British colonialists" (2010: 88), and with that inheritance, the ubiquity of English is demonstrated in the following narratives.

> E13: […] it was an easy transition. Malaysia is an English-speaking country and my friends all speak English fluently so it was easy for me.
>
> E70: I think that that's one of it as well because we do speak mostly English in Malaysia. But that's what made me come to UK to carry on my studies.
>
> E22: It probably did subconsciously. I don't think we ever spoke about it, because the main language obviously is English, and also because we would have been in [Malaysia]. So, English wouldn't have been an issue.
>
> E28: Well, it would have to be an English-speaking country… mainly the UK because I grew up reading a lot of Enid Blyton books. So, I had an affinity or an idea of what it would be like to try and live in the UK because it sounds so interesting. I always wanted to study abroad as well. So, it was always either going to be America or the UK. I think because of growing up reading Enid Blyton, UK was the choice.
>
> E33: I think because of where we come from, everyone speaks English. And I think it was almost seamless, really. Coming over here with the language and everything… because you could speak English and understand it, and it was fine.

E13 and E70 contend that Malaysia's status as an English-speaking country has greatly facilitated their educational transition to the United Kingdom, describing the move as "an easy transition" due to the prevalent use of English in Malaysia. For E22, the decision to relocate was somewhat "subconscious", influenced by English being the primary language for both her and her partner, thus minimising language barriers in their migration experience. E28's narrative adds another dimension to this discussion by highlighting the impact of English literature on her aspirations. Her exposure to English books, particularly Enid Blyton's works,

not only fostered her linguistic skills but also shaped her cultural perceptions and preferences. This literary influence nurtured a connection with English-speaking cultures, steering her decision-making towards pursuing education in an English-speaking country, with the United Kingdom emerging as her preferred destination. Her narrative chronicles how cultural experiences, such as reading, can deeply influence one's affinity for a language and a culture, guiding significant life choices like education and migration. And for E33, the omnipresence of English and the idea that "everyone speaks English" made migration seem like an "almost seamless" decision for her move to the United Kingdom.

Apart from language being one of the main criteria for comprehension and expression, the subsequent narratives disclose that language serves as an important device for adaptation in the host society.

> E65: Yes, it did. Although on hindsight it should not have been. It was likely because I/my family felt that adapting to life in another country far away from home would be a lot easier if there is something in common - language. […] So, it really did help that there was another foreign thing that you had to have to carry over your belt. It was just more about trying to adapt into, I guess, a society more than anything else.
>
> E40: It does make it easier to mingle and blend in with society if you do speak the same language. So, I would definitely agree that language does contribute to the fact that we chose England.
>
> E23: Yeah, I think the ability of speaking English. And so, it was quite a determining factor for us. Wherever we go, it is going to be English… just English-speaking countries. So, like, we didn't consider, for example, France or any European languages or countries. Just for the fact that we can speak English and it's easy to embed into the country.
>
> E47: I think the advantage of that is we learn English from young age. I think one thing also is that I'm a banker and I speak English, so English is not strange for me. And to move to other countries speaking other languages will be very tough for enrichment. So, I think it's an advantage if you can speak the language of that country, so you find it more easy *(sic)* to settle in.

> S03: I think it did. But mostly I would not move to a non-English speaking country because it has different values and cultures that I feel do not fit with my own values and the values I envision my children to learn.

For E65, the shared language of English was a crucial element in her family's decision to adapt to life in a distant society, ranking it as a paramount consideration in their migration. E40 found that English facilitated easier social integration in the United Kingdom, playing a key role in their choice to move there. Similarly, E23 highlighted English proficiency as a decisive factor, consciously excluding non-English-speaking European destinations from their options, believing that English would simplify their assimilation into the new country. E47 also emphasised the benefits of learning English from a young age, noting how it eased her transition into the host society. This sentiment reflects a broader perspective among the participants that English serves as a bridge to cultural integration and personal adaptation in a new environment. Conversely, S03 expressed a distinct viewpoint, associating language with broader cultural values. Her reluctance to consider migration to a non-English-speaking country was not just about language barriers but also about aligning with a society that reflects her and her family's values. This illustrates the role language plays in migration decisions, not only as a tool for communication but also as a marker of cultural compatibility and integration.

From the narratives above, I have observed that great importance has been placed on the English language not solely in terms of self-adaptability and settlement, but also for the culture and values that supplement migration to an English-speaking country such as the United Kingdom. Conversely, these narratives inform me that language can be a hindrance if not mastered. The following narratives share their views and experiences of life while having to acquire a new language in a non-English-speaking country.

> E61: During my undergraduate, I did do a semester abroad in Denmark. The majority of people spoke English there. But for our purposes, having the official language or in shops and all that, it was all mostly written in Danish. I mean, I loved living in […], but I definitely think the language was a barrier… it was a real obstacle. I did look around for a master's programme and they were all going to be in English. But I think in terms of the long term… wanting to work in the country, etc. I definitely didn't speak any other European languages. That's why I only considered like the US or the UK.

> E19: I guess it's convenient, to certain extent because having been born and bred in […], a small town or were closer to […]. And because most of our parents and our friends' parents were educated during the British colony, colonisation period. Therefore, English… a lot of us used it widely in […], and around the […] area. So, I guess we're quite comfortable in terms of the language. And obviously, then we tend to seek out countries where we're a little bit more comfortable like Australia, the UK or the US. So, I guess it does play a part in it. I guess because especially in terms of finding work or profession, it plays a bigger part. Because if I was actually moving to Germany, for example, or France, then there's this transition period where you actually have to make sure and force yourself to learn French. Not only casual terms, but also from a business perspective. And there's a lot less opportunities to begin with, unless of course, you assimilate yourself and you're able to actually speak proper French or so.
>
> E39: I personally prefer English-speaking countries because that's one of the languages that I could speak. I'm too scared to do any of those.

E61 recounts her experiences of studying for a semester in Denmark and the challenge she faced due to the language barrier. Despite the fact that many people spoke English, she felt hindered by her lack of Danish proficiency, particularly when navigating written information in shops. She enjoyed living in Denmark but ruled out the possibility of long-term migration there because of the necessity to learn Danish, which is an official language requirement for employment. Her language limitations made her consider only English-speaking countries like the USA or the UK for potential migration. E19 shares a similar perspective, focusing on English-speaking nations such as Australia, the UK, or the USA for migration, where language compatibility would ease the transition, particularly in professional contexts. He acknowledges that moving to non-English-speaking countries like Germany or France would necessitate a significant adjustment period to learn the local language for both social and business engagements. Without local language proficiency, he fears that he might face limited opportunities. E39 is candid about her preference for English-speaking countries over learning new languages, indicating a strong apprehension about language acquisition. She prioritises her comfort with English and the perceived ease of integration it would afford in English-dominant societies.

Though some participants expressed their readiness to relocate to a non-English-speaking country, they also stated their preference for English as a medium of communication.

> E32: I think I wouldn't have mind that at all. But of course, having spoken English helped. There's another thing. Growing up, there was a lot of English literature in my house, a lot of English authors, as a child as well as an adult. And so, I grew up with Malory towers, those boarding school situations. I did English literature as well.
>
> I01: I went to Convent […], so English is not a problem for me since school days. Of course, if I were to move to a non-English-speaking country, I am sure I will be able to still speak English on a professional basis, and will learn the local language to get by.
>
> UA05: I would consider other countries if they have English speaking degrees that I could afford. I don't mind being in a non-English-speaking country for daily living as long as I can complete my studies in a language I am proficient in, such as English.
>
> E05: So, because when I was growing up, we moved a lot. So, we lived in Indonesia, Singapore, or Hong Kong, so I've always had to pick up languages as I went along. So, it didn't really matter where I've got to show… I would have picked it up anyway. But we grew up speaking English at home. So, English is the easiest out of all the choices.
>
> S07: Yes. I probably still would've accepted non-English-speaking countries but only if all the English options were unavailable.
>
> E35: No. I would have accepted non-English medium universities at the time. However, I would probably be much more reluctant knowing what I know now, i.e. the difficulties of integrating socially in the years needed to obtain colloquial fluency.

E32 expressed a preference for English-speaking countries, influenced by her upbringing amid ""a lot of English literature" and works by "English authors". While she did not rule out moving to a non-English-speaking nation, her familiarity with English played a crucial role in her preference. In contrast, I01 and UA05 were open to the idea of migrating to countries where

English is not the primary language, confident in their ability to learn the local language for daily activities while continuing to use English professionally or for their studies. E05's experience of frequently moving to different countries enabled her to adapt to new languages easily, although she grew up speaking English at home and found it to be the "easiest" option. For S07, relocating to a non-English-speaking country was considered only if no English-speaking options were available, suggesting such a move would be a last resort due to a lack of alternatives. E35, on the other hand, expressed hesitation about studying in a non-English medium university due to the challenges of social integration and achieving colloquial fluency. Reflecting on their migration to the United Kingdom, E35 acknowledged the benefits of this decision, particularly in understanding the social integration challenges and the time required to master everyday language fluency in a new environment.

The British influence during the colonial period has undoubtedly left part of its legacy, one of which is through language. Language is indisputably the paramount legacy, with the worldwide expansion of the English language, establishing itself as the international language of the world. C.K. Ogden, an English linguist, held the belief that "English was the only language sufficiently adaptable" and "universalised by simplification" (in Hyam, 2007: 24), and that everyone would be able to communicate in this diachronic English anywhere in the world—a statement that many of the research participants have testified to. The profound impact of British colonialism, along with the widespread dissemination of the English language, has transformed English into a dominant and globally recognised language in contemporary times. Based on the qualitative semi-structured interview question on whether language had contributed to their decision to migrate to the United Kingdom, the responses shared by most of the research participants highlighted their preference for the English language, as it is one of their acquired languages, if not, a dominant language for some. Considered as a pragmatic language with its "modernizing influence" (Lee *et al.*, 2010: 95), the participants acknowledged the value of the language academically and socioeconomically, empowering them to use the language for self-progression. This is consistent with Luthra and Platt's research:

> It is clear then that recent Pakistanis are more skilled than previous flows, and there has been some general trend in this direction over time. The changes in English language fluency are striking, especially as language is important not just for work but also for social relations. (2017: 37)

As evidenced by Luthra and Platt and the narratives above, it was indicated that investment was made in communicating in English on a conscious level "for utilitarian reasons" (Holst, 2015: 99), such as capitalising on socioeconomically advantageous opportunities for their future. The participants in my research chose the United Kingdom as their destination on the premise that their proficiency in English meant there was no need to learn a new language.

Migration has many challenges for immigrants who want to minimise obstacles. As mentioned by some of the participants, migrating to a country where they can communicate in the same language is one less obstacle to overcome. In turn, this enables them to focus more on their integration and settlement processes. Furthermore, my findings have revealed that proficiency in English is part of their identity construction. As explored in this section, for some participants, despite coming from different sociolinguistic settings where they interchanged between Malay, Mandarin/Cantonese, Tamil or other languages in various contexts, I have observed that the English language operates as the primary language in some households. This comes as no surprise to me, as this phenomenon reflects the linguistic variables present amid Malaysians of different ethnocultural backgrounds. What I found remarkable during the investigation was that most of the participants testify that they are more at ease communicating in English than any other language in their repertoire—an indicator of their ethnocultural identity. This observation resonates with the findings of Sharma (2012), who explored the Indian diaspora and noted the ease of communicating in English among second-generation immigrants, a trend not as prevalent among the first generation.

This discussion provides a foundational context for the next section, where I will explore the details of immigration and visa processes. The upcoming analysis will delve into the bureaucratic and legal structures that govern migration, examining how these frameworks shape the experiences of individuals as they navigate the complexities of settling in a new country. The decision to relocate to the United Kingdom is significantly influenced by the facilitating role of immigration policies that exist between Malaysia and the United Kingdom, making the transition slightly smoother for immigrants. By exploring the intersection between these regulatory systems and the personal narratives of immigrants, I aim to shed light on the challenges they face or not. This examination will not only highlight the procedural aspects of immigration but also reveal the human dimensions of these experiences, illustrating how policy and personal stories intertwine in the context of global migration. This deeper understanding will enhance the appreciation of the diverse factors that influence an immigrant's journey,

yielding a comprehensive view of the interplay between individual agency and the overarching legal and bureaucratic constraints.

4.4.2. Immigration and visas

The United Kingdom, sharing Commonwealth ties, is home to a substantial Malaysian community numbering 78,736, predominantly residing in Greater London and other major English cities, as detailed in section 2.2.7. This demographic trend gained momentum after World War II and Malaysia's independence in 1957. The historical connections stemming from Malaysia's past association with the British empire have significantly shaped its immigration policies and visa requirements for entry into the United Kingdom. In this section, I provide a comprehensive overview of the various visa categories available for Malaysians seeking to migrate to the United Kingdom and link this information to relevant accounts from participants, which were gathered through qualitative interviews. These narratives impart invaluable knowledge about how these individuals navigate the visa process, enriching the understanding of their migration experiences in the context of the enduring Malaysia-United Kingdom relationship.

The rationale behind including the interview question, "What kind of preparation was required for the migration?", was to enhance my understanding of the preparatory steps the participants took during their migration journey. Additionally, this question aimed to ascertain whether the preparation process itself was a facilitating factor in their decision to choose the United Kingdom as their migration destination. Likewise, I was curious to find out if the immigration procedure was complex or a fairly easy and straightforward one, given the visa options that are available for Malaysians. There are several categories of visas Malaysian nationals are eligible to apply when considering moving to the United Kingdom: the UK Ancestry visa; British citizenship; the Right of Abode; Family visa; Work Visa and Student visa. These are the visa options that have allowed these participants to move and settle in the United Kingdom. Apart from short-term visits as a tourist, where Malaysian nationals can stay for up to 6 months without a visa, as a member of the Commonwealth, Malaysian nationals are eligible to apply for the UK Ancestry visa which allows them to permanently settle in the United Kingdom. Table 2 in Appendix 5, where I have gathered information from the United Kingdom government website on the requirements and eligibility, provides this information.

As illustrated, not only do the UK Ancestry visa holders who fall under the stated categories and fulfil the eligibility criteria have free movement into the United Kingdom without immigration border controls, but they are also able to benefit from having rights to live, work, study, and vote in the United Kingdom without restrictions. One out of 93

participants, E64, holds a UK Ancestry visa owing to his grandfather who was British, qualifying him for the application of this type of visa.

> E64: It was a no-brainer for me to actually come up to the UK because I am part English. So, I was able to actually come through ancestry. […] in terms of the paperwork, I just went into to the British High Commission in KL, I submitted all my documentation. All I had to show was my birth certificate, my dad's cert. to get my grandfather's death certificate to indicate that this is the relation and I'm related to him. And within five days, I got a call and they said that my passport and my visa were ready to be picked up. So, I came up here with the purpose to work, pursue a living in event management. […] and realised that I actually wanted to do sciences when I was younger. I'm now given the opportunity as a home student, I get home fees, and I am able to apply for a loan.

E64 described his decision to move as a natural one, citing his partial English ancestry. His narrative suggests that the visa application process was relatively straightforward for him. By visiting the "British High Commission in KL" and submitting the required documents, including his birth certificate and his British grandfather's death certificate (which was linked through his father's birth certificate), E64 was able to establish his familial connections. Remarkably, it took less than a week for him to receive his completed passport and visa. This experience signifies the efficiency and simplicity of the UK Ancestry visa process in E64's case thanks to his family lineage which significantly eased his migration pathway. The relative ease of obtaining a long-term visa that comes with extensive rights encouraged E64's decision to relocate to the United Kingdom. Holding a UK Ancestry visa allowed him to enrol in university not as an international student but with the status and financial advantages of a "home student" including access to "home fees" and eligibility for a student loan. The transition from work to education exemplifies the flexibility and opportunities provided by the ancestry visa in facilitating E64's goals and adapting to new situations. This informs me of the privilege and possibilities E64 is given in terms of education and employment as a result of having British ancestors and the recognition of that ancestry through exercising those rights in the United Kingdom. It is no wonder that E64 chose to migrate to the United Kingdom as opposed to any other country.

By the same token, those born in the United Kingdom to at least one Malaysian parent but who returned to Malaysia have another type of right to live there, called the Right of Abode. It allows the right holders, on the one hand, to live, study and work in the United Kingdom without any immigration controls, but on the other hand, they do not simultaneously have British citizenship. As illustrated in Table 3 in Appendix 5, it outlines that a person who is entitled to the Right of Abode has more or less the same rights as a British citizen. In the case of Malaysians holding a Malaysian passport and qualifying for the Right of Abode, a certificate of entitlement is inserted into the passport, and thus they must show proof when entering the United Kingdom. Two out of 93 participants, E37 and E71, have the Right of Abode by way of either having been born in the United Kingdom or having a parent who is a British national.

> E37: […] I was actually born here to Malaysian parents. So, because of that I have a British birth certificate which allows me to something called the right of abode, which pretty much means like I can stay here with no limitations, and I pretty much have rights like any citizen here. So yeah, that's how I came over… decided to come over and see what life was like. UK wasn't my first choice… it was somewhere else. But then after giving it some thought it was pretty much like a no-brainer because I didn't need a visa like a lot of people. […] I didn't need that with my British birth cert. I'm pretty much like a British citizen except the fact that I hold a Malaysian passport. So, that made me decide to come here. […] What they call a certificate of entitlement to the right of abode.

Born in the United Kingdom to Malaysian parents, E37 has a British birth certificate, endowing her with the Right of Abode. This grants her unrestricted duration of stay and rights comparable to those of a British citizen. Identifying as a British citizen, E37 holds a Malaysian passport with a certificate of entitlement, symbolising her unique bi-national identity. Despite not initially favouring the United Kingdom as a migration destination, choice to move was significantly influenced by her Right of Abode, making the decision somewhat inevitable due to the substantial legal and logistical advantages it presented. In contrast, E71's situation is slightly different. Being half British and half Malaysian, with a British nationality through her mother, E71's connection to the United Kingdom is through parentage rather than birthplace. This distinction highlights the diverse ways in which individuals can possess or acquire a connection to the United Kingdom, each situation presenting its own set of implications for migration choices and the rights associated with residency and citizenship.

> E71: I'm half British, half Malaysian. My mum is British. […] So, we've kind of moved between the two places as well. But the first 19 years I lived there [in Malaysia], and we came over [here] for holiday as some family was here. I always knew I was with coming here for studying and stuff. Once I was here, because I wanted to work here as well, I preferred working here because I had gone back to work in Malaysia as well and didn't like it. So, I came back again. […] I have a Malaysian passport and British citizenship because I have a British mother.

Though E71 does not have the birthright as she was not born in the United Kingdom, she falls under the same category as E37, one who is eligible for the Right of Abode and, by extension, the same benefits, such as the unconditional right to enter, live, work, study, and vote in the United Kingdom. E71's migration decision was deeply influenced by her familial ties to the United Kingdom and the educational opportunities it presented. She "always knew" she was going to study in the United Kingdom, a plan likely shaped by her half British heritage and the educational prospects available there. Following a stint of work experience in Malaysia, which did not align with her preferences, E71 decided to return to the United Kingdom for employment opportunities. This move reflects her stronger affinity for the lifestyle and professional environment in the United Kingdom, underlining how personal experiences and family connections can significantly guide one's migration choices and career path. Both narratives give me an indication of their migration to the United Kingdom as a way of benefitting from and exercising their Right of Abode. What is more, they are free from the hassle of immigration paperwork to obtain a visa. E23's migration story to the United Kingdom unfolds differently, as it was a joint decision with her husband, who has his own unique connection to the United Kingdom. Although born there, E23's husband did not have British citizenship from birth because his parents did not apply for it on his behalf. Instead, he held a Malaysian passport.

> E23: My husband was doing his MBA, so we moved over here. And then we found that he's got the rights to stay because he's actually a British. […] So, the history is my husband was born in the UK, but he grew up in Malaysia. And the parents thought when he was 18, because they didn't exercise the rights for citizenship, they thought it had expired. So, they didn't think much about it after that. When he came back for the Uni, he was paying for tuition fees. We were just having a chat with his friend, and he was like, "why don't

> you try applying or try looking at whether you are actually British?" So, we did go to our government website and had a search, but there wasn't anything that was clear enough to tell whether he is or he's not. Then he thought, let's just spend some money… I think it was about 60 pounds to apply for a UK passport back then. He did that and then two weeks later, we received the passport that says nationality British. So yeah, that was fairly easy, he didn't need to do anything else. But for myself, I just applied for a spouse visa because he was here as a student, so I was really like a student spouse. So, I just need to convert that to a spouse visa for five years. So, after holding a spouse this visa for five years, then I'm eligible to move on to leave to remain visa like a PR. Yeah, so I'm a PR now, and I think after a 10-year PR, I can apply for citizenship. So that's the route.

There are cases where individuals are not fully aware of their entitlements regarding the rights of children born in the United Kingdom to non-citizen parents. This was evident in the situation of E23's husband, who missed out on early benefits of British citizenship. It was only after a conversation with a friend that E23 and her husband were prompted to apply for his citizenship. E23 described the application process as "fairly easy", with her husband receiving his British passport within two weeks, affirming his British nationality. This newfound status allowed E23 to transition from a student spouse visa to a spouse visa, setting her on the path to Indefinite Leave to Remain (ILR) after a five-year residency. E23 is also considering applying for British citizenship after a decade of permanent residency, a step that is consistent with the country's immigration policies. Her narrative chronicles the significant impact of her husband's British citizenship on her own immigration journey, illustrating a path to settlement in the UK that is deeply intertwined with familial and legal connections. Many of the participants have attested to the obtaining of the right of abode or citizenship as a "fairly easy" process which may have played a part in their international migration to the United Kingdom, including E42:

> E42: It was just I had a British PR. I had a British permanent residency since I was four years old. And we kept renewing it. […] I literally just arrived at immigration, they stamped my passport, and that's that. It was pretty straightforward.

E42 acquired British permanent residency at the age of four, following her father's employment-related migration to the United Kingdom (refer to section 4.3.1). She has

consistently renewed this status, though it remains ambiguous whether these renewals occurred within the United Kingdom or elsewhere, and whether her reference to "British PR" actually denotes an ILR. However, E42's account highlights a "straightforward" immigration experience, notably her initial entry into the United Kingdom, where her passport was stamped without any need for additional procedures. This consistent renewal of her settlement status has afforded her the ability to return to and live in the United Kingdom permanently with ease and the continuity of her residency maintenance.

Thus far, I have explored the various immigration status types that a fraction of the participants were eligible for: UK Ancestry visa, British citizenship, and the Right of Abode. Being a Malaysian national, there are a number of alternative visas that allow for migration and permanent settlement in the United Kingdom, for example, Family visas, Work visas, and Student visas. These are the types of visas the rest of the participants have used in order to remain after migration in the United Kingdom. The most frequent visa the participants initially had was the Student visa, with 50 out of 93 participants moving to the United Kingdom for education before the year 2020 and Brexit. Those who arrived after 2008 had to comply with the United Kingdom five-tier, points-based immigration system introduced by the Labour government, which saw different types of work or study visa applications for non-EU/EEA immigrants. For Student visas, the process included a place being offered at a registered British educational institution prior to application, proof of sufficient financial funds for the duration of their education, as well as proof of English language proficiency.

For a large number of participants, the Student visa application was managed by their parents or an immigration agency, and the tertiary educational institutions at the time. As such, the information from their point of view was limited. Equally limiting was the time at which this process occurred, as many of them were unable to recall the exact details that took place a long time ago, even decades for some. However, most participants were able to provide, to some degree, details of the process.

> E25: That was a lifetime ago, I had to do a medical. And of course, the UK Government needed a source of funds to fund University. I remember… I think a lot of the admin was done by a cousin of mine and my grandparents or my grandfather at that point.
>
> E11: I had taken the Cambridge English 1119 test in anticipation of the idea that I was going to apply for a place at a UK Uni, even though we were not

> sure if the Uni application process would require it or not. Once a Uni place was confirmed and they sent the acceptance documents, I only needed to fly to the UK and present the paperwork at immigration at the airport and the student visa was given there at the airport. There was no requirement to apply for a student visa in advance in Malaysia before departure.
>
> E15: I was still below the age of 20. Obviously, my parents helped me a lot with getting the winter clothes ready, getting the visa, the paperwork, the finances and arranging accommodation. That was the pre-departure trip, I remember just having to do a lot of advanced preparation and chasing up with accommodation as it didn't seem like the university was really on top of things. We didn't hear which accommodation I was allocated to the very last minute. And of course, I wasn't allocated a preferred choice. So, a lot of chasing up before and after arrival. Apart from that, I think it was the basic package.
>
> UA05: Letter of intention to apply for university admissions, IELTS exam and TB medical exam for university admissions.

E15 described the student visa application process as a "basic package", and UA05 emphasised the necessity of a tuberculosis (TB) medical exam. Beyond the essential steps of securing the visa, handling paperwork, and organising finances and accommodation, E15 underlined the importance of preparing for the country's colder climate, particularly the need for winter clothing—a significant consideration given Malaysia's tropical weather. E15 also shared information about her pre-departure preparations, specifically her efforts to coordinate accommodation details. She recounted the challenges of ensuring everything was in order, expressing frustration that her university seemed disorganised, which ultimately resulted in her being allocated accommodation that was not her first choice. E11 provided a retrospective view, recounting her experience in 1999 when she could obtain her Student visa directly upon arrival in the country. This process, requiring her only to present the necessary paperwork at immigration, was part of the Prime Minister's Initiative (PMI) under Tony Blair's New Labour government.

> Tony Blair chose the London School of Economics to launch a policy encouraging collaboration between universities, colleges, the government and other bodies, to increase the number of international students in the

> United Kingdom in recognition of their importance in fostering international relations, and long-term political and economic benefits (Walker, 2010, p. 172). Known as the Prime Minister's Initiative (PMI) it set a target of an additional 75,000 non-EU students by 2005, 50,000 in HE and 25,000 in Further Education (FE) facilitated by the streamlining of entry procedures and work rules for overseas students with an increase in the number of Chevening scholarships (aimed at overseas postgraduates). (Walker, 2014: 334)

As Patricia Walker explains in *International Student Policies in UK Higher Education from Colonialism to the Coalition: Developments and Consequences*, the PMI aimed to draw more international students to the United Kingdom. By easing visa procedures, the PMI demonstrates the nature of immigration policies and their significant impact on the experiences of international students in the United Kingdom. This initiative is a key example of how policy shifts can facilitate or reshape the academic and social landscape for students from abroad, highlighting the broader context of how the country's approach to international education has transformed over the years.

Following her completion of education, E28 was not prepared "to go back just yet" and sought alternative methods to extend her stay in the United Kingdom, exploring various avenues to fulfil her wish to remain in the country.

> E28: I came here to study. And so, I did my bachelor's degree. And then I continued on to do a Master's, and then decided that I didn't want to go back just yet. So, I stayed on for a couple of years, with what was called a working holiday visa, which is open to Commonwealth citizens. So that gave me another two years, at which point I found myself a job. And then my employers sponsored me for a work permit. So, after four years or five years, then I applied for indefinite leave to remain. And I've been here ever since.

E28 capitalised on the "working holiday visa", a provision available to Commonwealth citizens, which allowed her to extend her stay in the United Kingdom for a couple of years after her studies. During the 1990s, when E28 chose to prolong her stay, the "working holidaymaker" visa required applicants to be Commonwealth citizens aged 17 to 27, have sufficient funds for their upkeep and accommodation, and plan to engage in holiday employment for up to two years (UK Home Office, 1994). E28 successfully secured employment within this two-year

timeframe, which enabled her to transition to a work permit sponsored by her employer. This employment then paved the way for her to apply for ILR, demonstrating a strategic navigation through immigration pathways to achieve long-term residency. Indeed, the obtaining of a work permit was granted to UK-based employers who had to sponsor the employee to "fill genuine vacancies for additional roles" that otherwise could not be occupied by the local labour market, as stated by the Migration Advisory Committee in *Analysis of the Points Based System: Tier 2 and dependants* (2009: 18). Ultimately, "after four or five years" of residing in the United Kingdom, E28 met the criteria for ILR. The requirements she fulfilled included holding a work permit, living continuously in England for four years, and demonstrating that her employment was still necessary to her employer (UK Home Office, 1994; Migration Advisory Committee, 2009). This achievement marked a significant milestone in E28's journey, solidifying her long-term residency status there. E28's determination to live in the United Kingdom is reflected in the evolution of her immigration status, converting a student visa to a working holidaymaker visa, then a work permit, and finally to ILR. By the same token, S08's visa had undergone several stages of conversion.

> S08: I don't actually know anything about the fees and stuff, because my parents would have dealt with all of that. When I came to the UK at that time, the visa requirements were not that difficult. And I just recall, you had to have your student visa, a letter from the university, and proof that you can pay the fees. And so that was kind of relatively easy… coming in and out as a student. And then after a few years, I applied for permanent residency. Just because it was a hassle every time you apply for a job, you had to fill in the same paperwork, and go get a stamp in your passport and all this kind of stuff. So, I applied for a PR and got it. And I have been here for several years now.

Similar to other participants, S08's parents had a major part in managing her university student application process. Reflecting on her arrival in the United Kingdom in 1988, S08 noted that the visa requirements at the time were relatively straightforward. She recalled that the necessary documents for her student visa were comparable to those mentioned by other participants. After living there for a few years, S08 decided to apply for permanent residency, a move aimed at reducing the "hassle" associated with repeatedly navigating the employment process for job applications. The decision to seek permanent residency was also influenced by the fact that S08 had already spent many years there, indicating a long-term commitment to

residing in the country and the importance of streamlining her immigration status to simplify her continued stay.

Numerous individuals, among them Malaysian nationals, are drawn to the opportunity to gain work experience in the United Kingdom. In this research, 12 participants expressed a desire to migrate to the United Kingdom for employment purposes, representing a segment of the cohort interested in economic migration. Such a move necessitates navigating the country's immigration system, typically Tier 1 or Tier 2 visas or their equivalents. For instance, E63, a scientist who moved to England in 2016, was required to secure a visa under Tier 2, which is part of the points-based immigration system, specifically tailored for skilled workers at the graduate level.

> E63: So, I had to prepare seven months in advance of my Ph.D. Being so, I knew I had to have a certain amount in my bank account that had to be untouched. Plus, I also had to set aside money for the fees, the health surcharge fees, which I wasn't aware of, and that sort of added on to the expenditure. So once all the all that was sort of settled, I had to ensure that I knew what the prospective employer had to provide, and what I had to provide in order to make sure you have a successful outcome for the application, like a certificate of service called a certificate of sponsorship. And I also made sure that the jobs that I was applying to were eligible to hire non-EU/non-UK citizens, because not all jobs qualified to receive the certificate of sponsorship. […] When I looked through the job prospects and the group that would prospectively be working with, it felt right, and I knew that I could contribute to the project. […] And then I also had to make sure I had an IELTS exam done, even though my Ph.D. thesis and publication were in English. They still needed certification to make sure that you have a certain level of speaking, written and understanding English before you can move. I also had to do a health check, which involved a tuberculosis X-ray check and blood check.

E63's narrative provides detailed insights into the visa application process, aligning precisely with the Skilled Worker visa category. Her narrative matches the stipulations set by the UK Visa and Immigration department, as outlined in Table 4 in Appendix 5, affirming her compliance with the official requirements. Despite this alignment, E63 mentioned an additional

step in her process—a health check, including a tuberculosis X-ray and blood test—that is not explicitly listed among the standard requirements. This discrepancy highlights a possible variation or additional protocol in the visa application process that may not be uniformly documented or may be required based on specific circumstances or changes in health and safety protocols.

Compared to the other visa types explored earlier in this section, the process of applying for a work visa is perceived as more "tedious", according to S04's description. This reflects a relative increase in complexity, effort required to secure a work visa, and the procedures and documentation involved in obtaining authorisation for employment in the United Kingdom.

> S04: Although it mostly was taken care of by the employer's lawyers, we had to go on quite a tedious visa application process. I was a UK graduate, so I don't have any requirement for an English exam.

S04, who moved to the UK in 2011, did not delve into the specifics of the "visa application process" as it was largely facilitated by her employer's legal team. Being a "UK graduate" provided S04 with an exemption from the English proficiency test requirement, a stipulation that aligns with the guidelines from the UK Visa and Immigration department. These guidelines state that applicants who have obtained a degree-level qualification taught in English or who have successfully applied for a visa previously are not required to take an English proficiency test. This exemption punctuates the acknowledgment of prior educational achievements and visa history in simplifying the application process for certain candidates. Holding a British degree helps in reducing the documents needed for a Skilled Worker visa application, which may even aid in the future extension of a visa or subsequent settled immigration statuses.

Similarly, E26, as discussed in section 4.3.3, also mentioned her exemption from the English proficiency test, attributing it to the same reason as S04: possessing a British degree. This exemption reflects a consistent approach in the visa application process, where holding a degree from a British institution can fulfil the English language requirement, thereby streamlining the application for those with British academic qualifications.

> E26: I've been here since 2002 and I got my PR in 2006. After five years, you can apply for your PR. So, I thought yeah… but I don't know about my future plans. I mean, I don't want to stay here forever, but my children and my husband got British passports.

Having migrated in 2002, E26 obtained ILR in 2006. Despite securing this status, E26 harboured reservations about the permanence it implied, reflecting uncertainty about her long-term plans and a reluctance to commit to living in England indefinitely. Nonetheless, the presence of her "children" and "husband" in England, all of whom hold British passports, suggests a strong likelihood that she will extend her stay, possibly beyond her initial expectations. E26's situation illustrates a common theme among participants who have navigated various visa transitions to maintain their residency in the United Kingdom. Many individuals who were part of the Highly Skilled Migration Programme, operational until 2008 and subsequently replaced by the Tier 2 Skilled Worker visa, had to adapt to these changes. Like E26, the decision to adapt and transition between different visas often hinges on familial considerations, affirming the significance of keeping family units intact while navigating the immigration system. 28 of the participants migrated to be with their spouse/partner/sibling, entailing in their choice of an appropriate visa to remain legally in the United Kingdom.

> E50: I think in terms of paperwork to stay after Uni, that was a bit more difficult. I found a job straight away before graduation, so in terms of employment I was secured. But I couldn't apply because the company didn't sponsor a visa. But luckily, my boyfriend at the time…we had been together throughout the whole Uni, and he was British. So, I was able to get a partnership visa with him. […] You have to be a couple for at least two years. And in order to show prove like resident papers to show that you have been living together for two years consecutively.

> E03: I was only able to come on a tourist visa first for six months. And then I had to go back and apply for a fiancé visa. […] And my ex had to show that he had the funds to support me to prove that I wasn't going to claim benefits from the government. […] then I got Indefinite Leave to Remain. And that's when I had the paperwork to allow me to work for a good 20 months. And I didn't marry until 2007. By that point, I got my residence and applied for the British citizenship because I was here for more than five years.

> E49: We need to get ourselves a spouse visa, and I think that time we paid about 700 pounds but that was like 12 years ago. It's currently like more than 1000 pounds, I think. Then after only five years, I applied for Indefinite Leave to Remain. And the preparation was basically… there's a book that

you can read to sit through a life exam. […] So, it's very basic, day to day life kind of information. […] After the five years, I had to reapply for Indefinite Leave to Remain, and the second application cost me 1300 pounds.

E36: We have to complete an English exam with the British council, medical exam for tuberculosis registered with British immigration dept. Once all that is approved, and we received the certificate. Then we have to log in back into the UK home office to complete our visa. Plus, we needed to pay a medical insurance before they could approve our visa that cost 2700 pounds.

E08: I must say, it was one of the most stressful things that I've encountered… a few stressful inquiries I've had. It was a lot of paperwork […]. But long story short, it was a very tedious and stressful scenario doing the paperwork.

E13: When I got married, they required a written permission for marriage, life in the UK test, a specific licenced venue for marriage registration and application for limited leave to remain. It was quite a lengthy process.

E58: Paperwork, fees, life in UK test. I came as a holidaymaker then spouse visa. Got invited to Malaysia UK embassy for interview asking why I chose the UK for working holiday. And then, did my spouse visa and my first daughter a dependant visa from Malaysia to the UK.

E66: It was very easy to fly into UK during that era. Immigration requirements were not so strict. I only needed an invitation letter from my sister who was already married and became a British citizen much earlier. I also had a return air ticket as proof that I will return to my job in Malaysia after the 6 months tourist visa expired. I did not have to pay any money for the visa. […] By the end of the 6th month, […] was immediately given Indefinite Leave to Remain in the UK.

The extensive narratives above share the different steps that participants had taken in securing residency in the United Kingdom. They required a family visa in order to live with a family member for more than six months in the United Kingdom. Some of them have had to renew their initial visa: partnership, fiancé, tourist, working holidaymaker, spouse, to a more permanent one: ILR status and/or British citizenship. With visa requirements undergoing

constant changes, and thus more stringent requirements, E49, E13 and E58 who arrived from 2007 onwards, articulated their preparation and subjection to a "Life in the UK" test prior to application submission. Indeed, according to the Migration Advisory Committee (2009), since 2007 all those applying for permanent residency have been subjected to either a Life in the UK test and/or required to present an English for Speakers of Other Languages qualification. Table 5 in Appendix 5 provides an outline of the requirements for the spouse visa, fiancé visa, and family permit.

Among the participants, half described the legal process of obtaining residency or citizenship in the UK as challenging. E50 found it "difficult" and noted that it had "put a strain on the relationship", while E08 described the experience as "very tedious and stressful" and "one of the most stressful things" they had encountered. Despite enduring a "lengthy process" (E13) and facing substantial fees, which varied between 700 and 2700 pounds for E49 and E36 respectively, these participants felt compelled to navigate these hurdles to maintain their family unity. In stark contrast, E66 recounted a much simpler experience in 1983, when she moved to England to be with her sister. She described her legal process as "very easy", adding that she did not incur any visa-related expenses and was granted ILR upon her arrival, formalised at the immigration counter by the end of her sixth month in the country. This variance in experiences illuminates the changes in immigration policies over the years, reflecting a shift towards more stringent and costly procedures. A report based on surveys, focus groups, and direct interviews on the cost of visa applications by Migrant Voice in *Destroying, hopes, dreams, and lives: How the UK visa application costs and process impact migrants' lives* enlightens readers on the emotional stress and financial burden that immigrants undergo with visa renewal applications—a detriment to the lives of immigrants (2022). Furthermore, the report highlights the cost of visa renewals as an "insidious side of the Home Office's Hostile Environment policy, the goal of which is to make the UK as unattractive as possible for migrants who are not high-level investors or multi-millionaires" (Migrant Voice, 2022: 62). The report confirms the immigration processes that the participants in my research have articulated to be challenging and stringent over time, making it increasingly gruelling for immigrants to envision migration to the United Kingdom.

As elucidated in section 2.3.2, following the adoption of the points-based immigration system in 2009, migrants have been permitted to enter the United Kingdom temporarily via one of five tiers. The allocation to a tier depends on various factors such as age, qualifications, earnings, language skills, and financial resources. Each tier requires a different number of

points for eligibility (Salt & Bauer, 2020). The UK Border Agency, operational until its closure in 2013, formerly managed this information. Now, UK Visas and Immigration oversees applications for visits, work, study, or settlement in the United Kingdom. The British government introduced this system in response to the recession and to address economic and labour market demands (Migration Advisory Committee, 2009). The system's goal was to enhance efficiency, transparency, and objectivity in immigration procedures. A 2020 study by Salt and Bauer, titled *Managing Foreign Labour Immigration to the UK: Government Policy and Outcomes since 1945*, notes that this scheme is influenced by the Australian and Canadian models, which employ similar systems (refer to section 2.3.2). Over the past 15 years, the system has undergone several reforms, as detailed in Table 6 in Appendix 5, where I have incorporated the most recent immigration rules taken from the UK Visa and Immigration website, highlighting only changes that are pertinent to the participants in my research (in parenthesis and italics).

The modifications in Table 6 transition from the earlier two-tier work permit framework and various initiatives like the Working Holidaymakers and Highly Skilled Migrant Programme to a unified five-tier structure under the points-based immigration system (PBIS) (Salt & Bauer, 2020). One significant alteration is in Tier 1, where the Highly Skilled Workers scheme, now unavailable to non-EU/EEA migrants, and the Post-Study Work (PSW) visa have been phased out. This Highly Skilled Workers scheme replaced the Highly Skilled Migrant Programme, allowing migrants with corresponding skill levels and qualifications to enter the United Kingdom without a pre-established job offer or being tied to a specific employer. Salt *et al.*'s 2023 study, *Managing Foreign Labour Immigration to the UK: Learning the Lessons*, reveals that the Highly Skilled Migrant Programme welcomed 68,372 applicants from 74 nations between 2002 and 2008, with significant contributions from India, Australia, Pakistan, Nigeria, and South Africa. The discontinuation of the Post-Study Work route in 2012, which previously enabled recent non-EEA graduates from British universities to gain work experience for up to two years, marks another critical shift. Now, eligible graduates intending to work must apply under Tier 2 of the PBIS or venture into business via the new Graduate Entrepreneur scheme. In Tier 5, the Youth Mobility Scheme has taken over from the Working Holidaymakers, restricting eligibility to nationals from Australia, Canada, Monaco, New Zealand, San Marino, and Iceland, in contrast to the former scheme's broader Commonwealth and British territories accessibility. With ongoing modifications introduced by Brexit, navigating the immigration landscape in the United Kingdom has grown increasingly difficult for prospective migrants.

As I have explored thus far, Malaysian immigrants have been entering the United Kingdom via several well-known migration pathways, which consist of education, employment, the working holidaymaker scheme, or accompanying a family member, and ending with settlement via ILR, Ancestry, the Right of Abode or citizenship statuses. In *Migrant Settlement in the UK*, Walsh analyses how non-EU migrants settle in the United Kingdom, as well as the post-Brexit EU Settlement Scheme; he concludes that "most migrants who go on to acquire settlement do so within five years of first receiving their initial visa to come to the UK, and almost all of those who go on to settle do so within ten years" (2020: 5). A more recent analysis by Vargas-Silva and Rienzo in *Migrants in the UK: An Overview* (2022) provides a quantitative view of the migration patterns into the United Kingdom, delineating the reasons behind the relocation of EU and non-EU nationals. The statistics presented—48% of EU nationals migrating for work, 30% for family, and 13% for study, juxtaposed with 23% of non-EU nationals migrating for work, 46% for family, and 17% for study—offer a clear demarcation of migration motivators between these two cohorts. These figures divulge that while employment opportunities are the predominant factor for EU nationals, non-EU nationals tend to prioritise family reunification or related reasons. This differentiation may reflect the varied socioeconomic conditions and labour market dynamics in the EU versus non-EU countries. It could also be indicative of the different immigration policies and agreements that the United Kingdom has with EU and non-EU countries, affecting the ease of migration for work, study, or family reasons.

Furthermore, the finding that Indian nationals constitute the largest group of migrants (9%), followed by Poland (7%) and Pakistan (5%), points to the diverse origins of the United Kingdom's migrant population. This diversity could have significant implications for its cultural landscape, labour market, and public services. However, while these statistics are enlightening, they do not provide the qualitative nuances behind these migration trends. For instance, the motivations for Indian nationals might differ significantly from those of Polish or Pakistani nationals. The migration of Indians to the United Kingdom is influenced by a range of economic, social, and historical factors. Research by Hussain (2005), Sharma (2012) and O'Connor (2016) illuminate this trend, particularly regarding a notable influx of Indians from Punjab and Gujarat who moved to England. The lure of economic prospects, influenced by financial incentives tied to returning migrants' success and favourable exchange rates, coupled with the drive for social status in their local communities, significantly influenced their decision to migrate. Beyond these factors, the migration is also deeply intertwined with the

broader historical narrative of the British Empire's legacy in India, with past and present influences. In more recent times, the migration drivers have evolved. The United Kingdom's high standard of healthcare and education, alongside an established South Asian community, eases the transition for Indian expatriates. The economic landscape and labour market demands, especially for specialised skills in various sectors, continue to attract a significant number of Indian professionals and workers. The Skilled Worker visa, catering to those with confirmed job offers in the United Kingdom, is a testament to the ongoing economically driven migration. Additionally, the robust Indian diaspora, combined with the availability of quality education and healthcare, reinforces the country's appeal as a long-term destination for Indian migrants, giving prominence to a blend of immediate opportunities and enduring community ties.

The migration of Poles to the United Kingdom, particularly increased after Poland's accession to the European Union in 2004. Weronika A Kusek's research in *How do Polish immigrants in London reinforce local communities and influence the local economy?* (2017) indicates that around 579,000 Polish-born residents were living in the United Kingdom according to the 2011 ONS Census, with a significant number settling in London. This migration includes not only labour migrants, who form a substantial part of the Polish immigrant community, but also a growing number of professionals and financial elites. These groups contribute to the diverse Polish diaspora in the United Kingdom, engaging in various transnational activities and creating immigrant spaces that reflect their complex identities. Their migration is driven by a combination of economic opportunities, professional aspirations, and the cultural and national ties that they maintain with Poland. This movement represents a significant aspect of Poland's post-EU accession history, heralding a transformative phase in its transnational mobility patterns and the role of its diaspora in the United Kingdom. With the advent of Brexit, there is potential for a notable alteration in the volume of Polish immigrants, as the changing political and social landscape influences their decisions. As "their lives in the UK evolve and adapt to local norms" (Kusek, 2017: 725), their migratory choices and the dynamics of the Polish community may evolve significantly, reflecting their adaptation to new circumstances.

Both Indian and Polish migrations demonstrate similar economic, social, and historical factors, yet they diverge in their specific motivations, community dynamics, and potential future trends influenced by geopolitical changes like Brexit. While Indians are attracted by a combination of historical ties and contemporary opportunities, Poles are navigating the newer

landscape of post-EU accession mobility, with both communities continuously evolving and integrating within their new host country's societal fabric. Adding another dimension to this comparison, Malaysian migration to the United Kingdom presents a different pattern, predominantly motivated by education, with 55% moving for academic purposes, as discussed in 4.2. This is followed by 30% migrating to accompany family members, and 13% for employment. This trend highlights education as a principal conduit for Malaysian migration, contrasting with the migration reasons of EU nationals, particularly before Brexit, when EU and Swiss nationals enjoyed the benefits of free movement and easier employment access, unlike non-EEA nationals who required specific work visas. The Malaysian migration narrative adds a unique perspective, emphasising the educational and familial motives over the economic or political factors that are more prominent in the migration narratives of Indians and Poles.

Education migration among Malaysians correlates with the institutionalised, ethnocentrically biased impediments to equal opportunities in Malaysia. Pending reforms to ensure all-inclusive policies, Malaysia continues to face generations of aspirants who are willing to relocate for better and more hopeful life chances abroad. Walsh, Vargas-Silva, and Rienzo's analyses reverberate with my participant cohort and their settlement acquisition, with most of them settling within five years of being granted their initial visa in the United Kingdom, either through a student visa or a family visa, as they are most likely inclined to obtain a permanent status after having lived a substantial amount of time in their new country of residence. That said, with continuous changes and complexities in the immigration rules, questions arise as to whether life is still better in the United Kingdom for immigrants and whether their future is fraught with uncertainties. Moreover, the focus on Tier 1 and 2 visa routes for highly skilled or general skilled workers in the United Kingdom may pose additional obstacles for aspiring immigrants seeking economic migration. These visa routes align with the notion of "conditional qualities" outlined by Phillips (2005), which emphasise that migrants should possess attributes such as being "well-off, qualified, healthy, English-speaking", and exhibiting "loyalty to Britain" in order to assimilate into society (in Race, 2015: 56). This approach is seen as promoting an exclusivist perspective and leaning towards a more "assimilationist list of conditions for incoming migrants" rather than an integrationist model (Race, 2015: 56). Nonetheless, Malaysian immigrants continue to navigate these challenges that speaks volumes about their unique experiences and narratives, and how these visa routes and conditional qualities impact their pursuit of migration aspirations to the United Kingdom. The next and final section explores participant narratives on some of the determinant pull

factors for migration to the United Kingdom, what they had hoped to gain from it, and how these factors have impacted their lives.

4.4.3. Migration aspirations

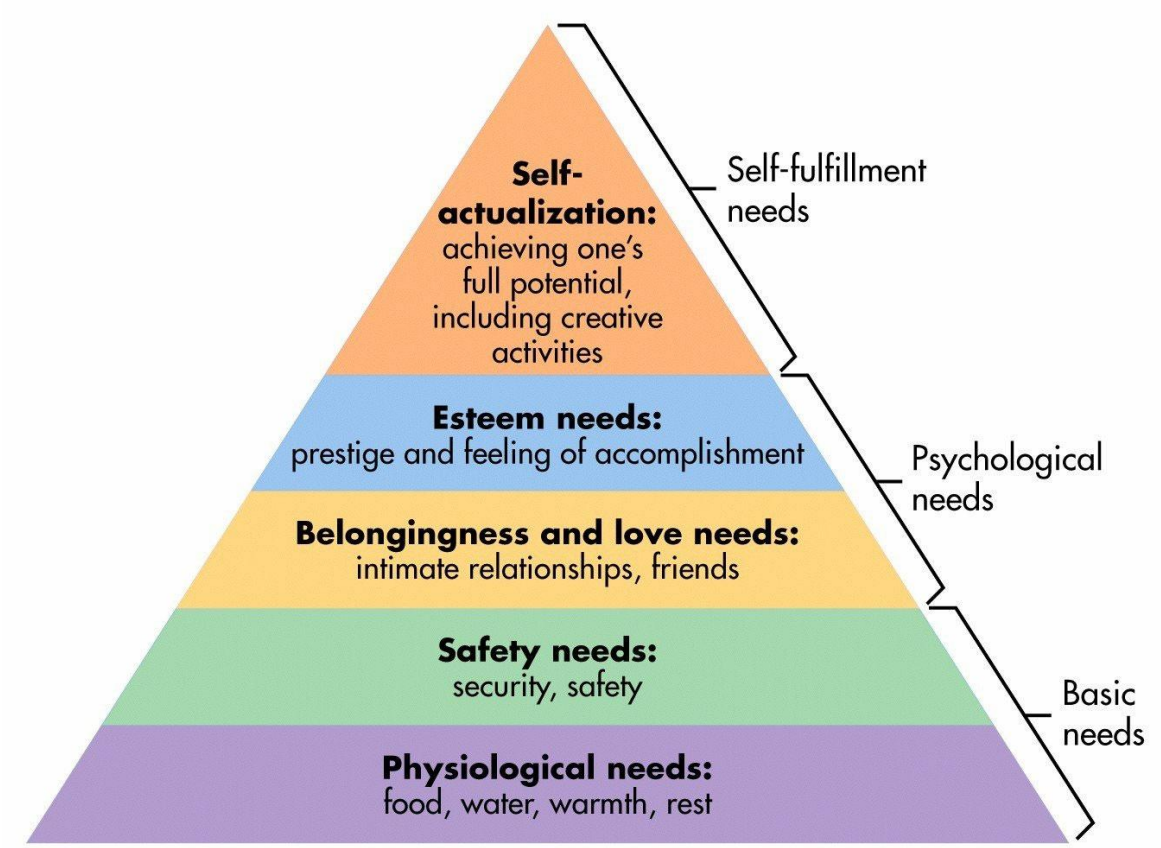

Figure 16: Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs. Source: www.mindforlife.org

Understanding human motivation and its impact on behaviour has long been a quest in sociological research. A breakthrough in this field was made by Abraham Maslow, whose pioneering work led to the establishment of a structured framework known as Maslow's hierarchy of needs (Thielke *et al*., 2012: 473). This theory, fundamental to psychological studies, posits a layered approach to human needs, ranging from the most fundamental to the nuanced pursuits of self-fulfilment. Maslow, an American sociologist, created a hierarchy of needs to explain human motivation and behaviour, which he laid out in a structured model (see Figure 16). In *Maslow's Hierarchy of Human Needs and the Adoption of Health-Related Technologies for Older Adults*, Thielke *et al*. (2012) describe this theory in detail. According to Maslow, human needs are arranged in a hierarchy from the most basic to the most complex: physiological needs, safety needs, love and belonging needs, esteem needs, and self-actualization needs. Maslow posited that individuals would primarily focus on satisfying lower-level needs before moving on to higher-level ones. Thus, behaviours are directed toward meeting the most pressing needs first. As one level of need is fulfilled, the next level becomes

the focus of attention. Maslow's theory suggests that the satisfaction of fundamental needs like food and shelter will predominate over the pursuit of higher-level needs like creativity. Moreover, the association between behavioural responses and these needs is stronger at the lower levels than at the higher levels. For instance, a person is more likely to exhibit a strong behavioural response to a stimulus related to physiological needs than to one associated with self-actualisation. Over time, individuals may oscillate between these needs based on their circumstances, with lower-order needs generally exerting a more immediate influence on behaviour than higher-order needs (Thielke *et al.*, 2012: 473-474).

Maslow's theory, in my view, provides a useful framework for understanding the migration aspirations of Malaysians in the United Kingdom. At the base level, physiological and safety needs are likely fulfilled for those who have chosen to migrate, as the decision to move often implies a pursuit of stability and security that the United Kingdom may provide. As these basic needs are met, the focus can shift to higher levels of the hierarchy. For many Malaysian migrants, belongingness and love needs could manifest through the maintenance of strong ties with family and friends back home, despite the physical distance. Esteem needs become particularly relevant when considering self-image and the desire to prove success to their family and friends in Malaysia. The act of migrating itself can be seen as an effort to fulfil these esteem needs—to gain respect, recognition, and a sense of accomplishment. Finally, the highest level, self-actualisation, involves achieving one's full potential and may be a significant driver for Malaysian migrants. This is where the desire to "come up in life" and seize better opportunities comes into full focus. Migration is often seen not just as a change in geography but as a means to personal growth and development, an avenue to explore and realise one's talents, capacities, and creative potential. In the context of Malaysian migrants, Maslow's hierarchy helps illustrate how migration might be part of a broader quest for self-improvement and societal recognition, aiming to satisfy the higher-level needs of esteem and self-actualisation, after ensuring that foundational needs are met.

While there is no unifying theory, the choice to migrate is very much driven by the motivation to succeed in developed countries for the prospects of a better life. Coming from a developing country, their aspirations are given an avenue in developed countries (OECD) where opportunities seem impartial (see 2.3.4). The yearning for better opportunities in education, employment and quality of life are recurring themes in the migration narratives. The faith and hope that participants and their families hold regarding transnational migration are perceived as a beacon of promise, symbolising a pathway to positive social mobility through

educational and employment opportunities. Benson and O'Reilly postulate that while migrants relocate for various motivations, the core impetus revolves around "the re-negotiation of the work-life balance, enhancement of quality of life, and liberation from previous constraints" (2009: 609). In line with Benson and O'Reilly, Salazar stipulates in *Migrating Imaginaries of a Better Life … Until Paradise Finds You*, that "virtually all forms of migration are related to aspirations of a 'better life'" (2014: 119). The significance of "a better [quality of] life" resonates profoundly in the participants' narratives, giving the impression of escaping a disadvantaged life prior to migration, and seeking "the greater good in life" (Benson & O'Reilly, 2009: 609). The participants have expressed, time and time again, their hopes for equality and a fair chance in education and work sectors in their new country of residence. Beyond that, the pursuit of higher-income employment, equal opportunities for career development based on merit and hard work, and not on ethnocultural or socioeconomic backgrounds, is also an important factor.

"A second home"/ "Part of the furniture here."

The participants who completed their education in the United Kingdom progressed to securing employment and settlement on site. Koh's theory on the three main reasons for migration among mobile Malaysians (see 2.2.5) corresponds with the participants' culture of migration and settlement in the United Kingdom. Analysed in section 4.4.2, upon completing her education in England, E28 felt a strong desire to extend her stay rather than return home immediately. This led her to secure a job in England, echoing a sentiment shared by E04. Initially, E04 had planned to finish her final year of studies and return to Malaysia, but her journey took an unexpected turn when she found herself settling in England. What began as a temporary stay for E04 evolved into over two decades of residence, leading her to regard England as a second home. Similarly, S01, after completing his education, transitioned smoothly into the workforce, where he shared his perspective on this life-changing decision.

> S01: I finished my studies, and I started working. And then, before you know it, time just goes by and I'm kind of part of the furniture here. So, I'm coming to 23 years now in Scotland.

For S01, the passage of time in Scotland has been swift, and after 23 years, he describes feeling "part of the furniture", a testament to his deep sense of belonging and integration within the community. As the years unfolded, what was initially a temporary stay for these individuals subtly evolved into permanent residency. Almost imperceptibly, they found themselves deeply

rooted in their host country, having discovered a new home and forged a new life, illustrating the profound impact of time and experience on their sense of place and identity.

"Lifestyle and income are better here."

As discussed earlier, the opportunity to enhance one's income is taken as an important motivation for migration. Migration to an OECD country may improve a migrant's income. A statistical report by the OECD in *How's Life? 2017: Measuring Well-being* (2017) on migrants' well-being overseas reported that more than 120 million foreign-born nationals are currently living in OECD countries, with 1 in 8 being migrants. It does not come as a surprise that many Malaysians harbour aspirations to migrate to the United Kingdom, aiming to earn in the local currency. E04, who initially planned to return to Malaysia after completing her education in England, believed that the skills she acquired from her British tertiary education gave her a solid foundation and an opportunity for employment. She anticipated that working in England would allow her to earn significantly more in pounds sterling compared to Malaysian ringgit. Echoing this sentiment, E48, who relocated in 2006, shared her experiences:

> E48: I would say that this is now my future. I have no intentions of going back to Malaysia for sure. I think I would struggle, workwise there and I might be better off here. Better lifestyle, and income is also a little bit better.

E48's narrative sheds light on the employment "struggle" that she could potentially face in Malaysia, and she would rather remain in England where she perceives herself to be benefiting in the professional, personal, and economic spheres. Both narratives have a common goal of "maximising individual earning potential" in a stronger currency compared with the currency in Malaysia (Hoey, 2005: 354). Indeed, the exchange rate between the two currencies reveals a striking difference, ranging between 1 GBP to 5–7 MYR, as recorded by the Bank of England from 2005 to 2023. Correlating with Salazar's better life aspiration analysis (2014), this could explain E04's and E48's strong desire to leave Malaysia *en route* to a better and alternative way of life, and how their migration is inherently "a part of their reflexive project of the self" or "the search for a potential self" (Benson and O'Reilly, 2009: 615), aligning with Maslow's theory of "self-esteem" and "self-actualization". And as Hoey says, "what makes a life worth living and what does not through a process in which geography has a bearing" (Hoey, 2005: 347), clearly describes the life decisions both participants have taken by weighing out the pros and cons between life in Malaysia versus life in the United Kingdom.

“All based on merit/No glass ceiling.”

While some of the participants in my research strive to climb up the professional ladder for self-progression based on merit, it may serve as a strategy for gaining visibility and recognition through work production in a professional setting (Francis-Granger, 2023). Upon asking if he had ever experienced any discrimination or racism in the 13 years of his settlement in England, E19 shares unambiguously:

> E19: I’ll be honest with you, none. I probably felt more discriminated in Malaysia than here. For me in the UK, professionally and personally, I’ve not had that problem whatsoever. There was no glass ceiling. I was in a very short time promoted to one of the top senior consultants within the organisation that I was working for. And it was all based on merit. There was no discrimination whatsoever. As Malaysians, we tend to work harder. Asians generally, I guess, we tend to work harder compared to our Western counterparts. And that has been an advantage for me at work, career wise, because you do get recognised. Clearly you get recognised for, if you put in a little bit more high work and a little bit smarter work, compared to the rest of the year. In a company of 100, in Malaysia, you probably have like 60% of the workers working just as hard as you are.

E19 implicitly elucidates his experience with discrimination both “professionally and personally” and how stigmatisation and discrimination encounters occurred in Malaysia. E19 encountered no discrimination during the process of trying to obtain employment in the United Kingdom as the process seemed transparent with “no glass ceiling”. His human capital became visible and valued in his new country of residence where his organisation promoted him to a high position “based on merit”. His narrative demonstrates the ethnocentrically biased policies that exist in Malaysia that have pushed hardworking Malaysians like E19 to seek employment elsewhere (Francis-Granger, 2023). Discussed in section 2.2.3, Eddo-Lodge (2018) offers a nuanced interpretation of racism, elucidating that it goes beyond mere personal prejudice. She articulates that when discrimination is coupled with power, it transcends individual biases, positioning itself to adversely impact the life opportunities of others. This perspective underlines the systemic nature of racism, where it is not just about personal attitudes but also about how these prejudices, when intertwined with power, can significantly alter and constrain the life trajectories of affected individuals. Taking into account her interpretation, for

Malaysian aspirants who desire career advancement founded upon skills and productiveness without ethnic profiling, migrating to another country becomes an appealing option (Francis-Granger, 2023).

"Grass is always greener on the other side"

The adage "the grass is always greener on the other side" poignantly reflects the sentiments of individuals like E57 and S01, who perceive opportunities abroad as more lucrative and equitable compared to their home countries.

> E57 & S01: Grass is always greener on the other side.

This perspective is rooted in the belief that foreign lands offer a fairer chance in education and employment sectors, where one's efforts and qualifications are rewarded irrespective of one's ethnicity. The aspiration for higher income, coupled with a merit-based career development system, presents an attractive proposition for those seeking visibility and recognition in their professional endeavours. This saying encapsulates the hope and aspiration for a more inclusive and rewarding environment, where success is determined by merit and hard work rather than predetermined biases. This pursuit is often misconstrued in the "debate around integration", as Hirsch points out:

> The whole debate around integration often overlooks the fact that many immigrants to the UK do not come with a headful of plans to live separately, or some kind of agenda as to how to avoid assimilation at all costs. They come with the ambition to create a better life than the one they have before. They bring with them their culture and traditions—mild attempts to preserve an element of their heritage […] Immigrants who came to the UK are not looking for segregation, nor do they *desire* to be treated differently. What they desire is to be treated the same. (2018: 293)

In this context, Hirsch's insights are particularly relevant as she argues that immigrants to the United Kingdom are not driven by a desire to live in isolation or escape assimilation. Their migration is fuelled by a quest for a superior life, equitable chances in professional and educational realms, and a system where career progression is merit-based. Their goal is not segregation but to be seen and treated as equals, desiring not differentiation but fairness. The journey brings a touch of cultural heritage, an effort to preserve their identity, yet their main aim is integration and equal treatment. The journey of E19, E57, and S01 epitomises the

immigrant experience of seeking to contribute to and flourish in a new community, where success is a product of one's merit rather than one's background. These narratives underline the broader aspiration among immigrants to find a place where the grass is not just greener but where they can plant their roots and grow, based on their abilities and contributions, in a land that affords them equal ground.

In sum, the preceding narratives have illustrated a common thread of stigmatisation and discrimination experienced in Malaysia, where professional competencies are often overlooked, negatively impacting employment and income opportunities. This has motivated individuals to seek alternative futures, particularly in the United Kingdom. For many Malaysians, acquiring a British education followed by employment and residency in the United Kingdom has not only been about better economic prospects but also about embracing British society and achieving a work-life balance considered superior to what they left behind. The allure of earning in a stronger currency is another impetus for their decision to remain in the host country, as it promises substantially higher earnings compared to the potential for only marginal income in Malaysia. These narratives thus far have reiterated themes such as fairness, equality, visibility, and a better quality of life. The availability of diverse opportunities in the United Kingdom has increasingly galvanised Malaysians to emigrate to the United Kingdom, resulting in a growing Malaysian diaspora over recent decades (Francis-Granger, 2023). Maslow's hierarchy of needs provides a lens to understand this migration trend, illustrating how migration is a quest for self-improvement and societal recognition, after foundational needs are met. This migration trend underscores a collective pursuit for a setting where professional achievements are recognised and rewarded, and where individuals can lead fulfilling lives in a perceived fair and unbiased society.

4.4.4. Chapter summary

In this chapter, I have interpreted and discussed participant narratives in connection with the facilitating factors for migration to the United Kingdom. I found several similarities that have manifested in their narratives. Having explored their preference for the United Kingdom, there were a number of considerations made for this choice, but the most common facilitators were the English language, visa immigration processes, and better life prospects. The ability to communicate in the same language as the host country has the advantage of avoiding an important obstacle of learning a new language or being misunderstood, in exchange for concentrating on their integration and settlement processes. Moreover, through our conversations, I learned that despite being polyglots, many of the participants spoke English at home, making it their primary language. This phenomenon connotes an inherent ethnocultural identity, bearing in mind the sociolinguistic setting in which they hail from, enabling them to communicate at ease in English. The next facilitator is the visa immigration processes that all of the participants have endured, in one way or another. As a Commonwealth of Nations constituent, Malaysian nationals are eligible to apply for various types of visas to enter and remain in the United Kingdom beyond the six-month visa-free period, as well as settled statuses. Most participants expressed the straightforward procedure for visa application, albeit with perpetual modifications of the requirements and steep fees. This demonstrates yet another tendency for Malaysian emigration, with most participants settling within five years of their initial visa (student or family) in the United Kingdom. Ultimately, themes like fairness, equality, and visibility, in addition to better employment, income, and lifestyle, were reiterated throughout the narratives. Although the pursuit of a better life in OECD/developed countries may mask the challenges faced in British society, according to participants, prospects seem promising compared with a developing Malaysia. This migration trend can be interpreted through the prism of Maslow's hierarchy of needs, which suggests that migration is a journey towards self-enhancement and societal acknowledgement, once basic necessities have been secured. Taking a giant leap out of their comfort zone for migration has been a stepping stone for the participants in my research, who seek to capitalise on a fair and better life in the United Kingdom.

4.5. Summary of Malaysian emigration to the United Kingdom

This part has explored the determinants of Malaysian emigration that are complex and multifaceted, rooted in a pursuit of enhanced educational, economic, and lifestyle opportunities. Predominantly, non-*Bumiputera* Malaysians have faced restricted access to public tertiary education and government employment, prompting their departure. Participant observations highlighted deeper frustrations with Malaysia's bureaucratic inefficiencies, restrictions on personal freedoms, ethnocentric policies, and stringent religious regulations. The World Bank's 2011 report identifies key factors driving this brain drain: the quest for quality education, higher wages, career advancement, social justice, political stability, safety, and lifestyle improvements.

Family influence emerged as a significant factor in emigration decisions, consistent with findings from studies on other diasporas, such as Luthra and Platt (2017) on the Pakistani diaspora, Ho (2011) on the Singaporean diaspora, and O'Connor (2016) on the Indian diaspora in the United Kingdom. Established Malaysian communities in the United Kingdom and the desire for merit-based career advancement further motivated emigration. This process often culminated in permanent settlement, driven by the pursuit of a better quality of life and improved socioeconomic status.

Current research on the integration and sense of belonging among Malaysian immigrants in the United Kingdom is limited. Understanding their diverse backgrounds, identities, and experiences is crucial, as these elements differ significantly from the dominant culture. First-generation Malaysian immigrants, in particular, maintain deep ethnic and cultural traditions. Their identity transformation post-migration is closely linked to their efforts and successes in integrating into the host society, aligning with Brown's (2006) research on the Indian subcontinent.

Education served as a critical motivator for migration. Participants perceived international tertiary education as a gateway to a better future, a view reinforced by family encouragement. This aligns with findings from Cheung *et al.* (2016), Chen & Bang (2020), and Kuah *et al.* (2021) on East Asian immigrants. However, the transition to a foreign environment brought significant challenges. Historical contexts, including British colonialism, have influenced Malaysian aspirations for quality education, better employment, and improved lifestyle, contributing to their social mobility goals.

The United Kingdom's attractiveness as a migration destination was facilitated by several factors: proficiency in the English language, manageable visa immigration processes, and promising life prospects. Fluency in English facilitated easier integration, while Commonwealth ties streamlined visa applications, despite frequent changes and high fees. Many participants achieved permanent settlement within five years of obtaining their initial visa. Recurrent themes in their narratives included fairness, equality, visibility, and better employment and income opportunities. Despite the challenges faced in British society, participants perceived the prospects as more favourable than in Malaysia.

This migration trend can be analysed through the lens of Maslow's hierarchy of needs, which posits that migration is a journey toward self-enhancement and societal recognition once basic needs are met. For many Malaysians, emigration represented a significant step toward achieving a fairer and more prosperous life in the United Kingdom, driven by aspirations for personal and professional advancement.

PART 5

TO BE MALAYSIAN IN THE UNITED KINGDOM

5.1. Introduction to part 5

The determining and facilitating factors of Malaysian migration have been explored in depth in Part 4. While there are numerous migratory pathways and facilitating factors that led many Malaysians to emigrate and settle in other countries, the United Kingdom is understood as the preferred migratory destination among the participants in my research. The Malaysian diaspora in the United Kingdom is a complex and diverse community living in a multicultural society. Being a Malaysian immersed in the culture, or rather the multifaceted cultural context, of the United Kingdom can be an enriching and transformative experience, allowing avenues to expand the immigrants' horizons and learn about different cultures, traditions, as well as ways of thinking and growing in new directions. As a consequence, the quest for identity and a sense of belonging following migration are significant issues for many members of this community.

Migration is a momentous event that often sparks questions about the true state of one's identity at a particular moment of one's life, and as a consequence, about the process of reassessing that identity. The experience of being uprooted from one's birth country and leaving behind family, friends, and a familiar environment often means adjusting to a different culture, language, and way of life—an experience that can be both overwhelming and disorienting. The process of acclimatising to a new environment is an open-ended journey that varies significantly from person to person. There is no fixed timeframe within which individuals must adapt to their new surroundings. During this period, individuals might experience a range of emotions, including homesickness, which is a longing for one's home country or familiar environment. Loneliness is another common feeling, where individuals may feel a sense of solitude or detachment from others. Isolation, which can be both physical and emotional, may also occur if the individual feels disconnected from the surrounding community or lacks a support network. These emotions are part of the complex process of adjusting to a new cultural, social, and physical environment. Many of the participants of the Malaysian diaspora in the United Kingdom have had similar experiences, and their search for identity and a sense of belonging has been shaped by these experiences. With the passage of time, Malaysian immigrants have managed to establish a new home for themselves while still holding on to their memories of life in Malaysia. On the one hand, the idea of the United Kingdom as a home has been embraced by many of the first-generation Malaysians. On the other hand, many of them have also shown a degree of scepticism regarding fully integrating into British society.

Consequently, many retain a strong connection to their native culture and ethnicity, actively seeking methods to preserve their cultural heritage.

While retaining their national and ethnocultural identities, Malaysian immigrants have employed several strategies in order to integrate into their new country of residence. The quest for a new beginning prompts questions about the specific strategies they have employed. What measures were necessary for these individuals to become integrated into the United Kingdom? Was assimilation a prerequisite for their integration, and if so, to what extent did they need to assimilate? Furthermore, the process of integration is scrutinised: was it a straightforward and easy process, or did they face challenges along the way? These questions aimed to elicit insights from the participants throughout our discussions.

Extensively explored in section 3.2.2, the assimilation and integration process involves immigrants adapting to and becoming integrated into their new host society. This multifaceted process necessitates efforts from both the immigrant community and the host society. The participants in my research outlined numerous strategies they employed to integrate into British society, such as adopting a British accent, engaging with and understanding mainstream British culture, and participating in social clubs, among others. These approaches not only illustrate their efforts to integrate but also shed light on the various challenges they encountered or continue to face during this transition. The challenges identified include dealing with cultural differences, experiencing homesickness, adapting to the climate, overcoming language-related issues, and facing discrimination.

Thus, this part sets out to delve into various facets of the Malaysian diaspora's experiences in the United Kingdom, spotlighting the most significant experiences of this specific group. First, I will analyse the assimilation and integration experiences of the participants, focusing on the strategies they employed and the obstacles they encountered. Subsequently, the analysis will extend to their sense of belonging in their current country of residence, exploring how they now perceive their identity. The empirical data gathered for this study facilitates a detailed examination of several recurring themes to elucidate the transformative process of identification and the extent to which Malaysian immigrants feel a sense of belonging to the United Kingdom; this includes, for some, an evolution towards becoming and identifying as fully British.

5.2. Assimilation, integration, challenges and sense of belonging: "Being" and "Becoming"

It is important to recognise that migration and diaspora experiences involve assimilation and integration processes. I have extensively explored the processes of assimilation and integration in section 3.2.2. As a reminder, assimilation is seen as a one-way process where the majority culture expects minorities to conform to its ways, aiming for minimal change in the majority's customs and policies. Although not synonymous with a *laissez-faire* approach, this process may involve efforts to enforce conformity (Modood, 2005; Race, 2015; Meer et al., 2016). On the other hand, integration is a bilateral process requiring active involvement from both majority and minority groups, promoting shared responsibility and fostering social cohesion, contrasting with the unidirectional focus of assimilation on minority adaptation (Modood, 2005; Race, 2015; Meer et al., 2016). In the United Kingdom, Malaysian immigrants experience a complex array of challenges and adjustments, influenced by variables such as socioeconomic status, education, and cultural distinctions. With assimilation pertaining to minorities adapting to the host culture's norms, and integration involving a mutual effort to cultivate a harmonious society that honours diverse identities, my research on Malaysian immigrants' assimilation and integration uncovered various themes related to their belonging and identity transformation in the United Kingdom. Analysing these themes provides deeper insights into their experiences, influencing policies and programs aimed at enhancing the integration and well-being of diasporic communities.

Thus, in the following sections, I delve into the themes of sense of belonging and identity transformation among Malaysian immigrants. Understanding belonging extends beyond simple affiliation with a nation or adherence to ethnic identities (Ullah in Motard, 2013). It is influenced by a myriad of factors such as migration dynamics, the forces of globalisation, and political movements, all of which mould individuals' connections to particular locales and communities (Ullah in Motard, 2013). In this context, several themes arise, illustrating the nature of cultural integration and identity transformation. Gastronomy emerges as a significant theme, where culinary practices serve both as a means of cultural preservation and as a bridge connecting different cultures. Faith-based observances play a crucial role in maintaining cultural identity and offer a sense of continuity amidst change. Language proficiency is another key theme, with the acquisition of the local language and accent symbolising a deeper level of integration into the host society. Parental activities also stand out, where active participation in family-oriented and communal parenting responsibilities strengthens familial bonds and fosters

connections within the community. Moreover, engaging in social activities, such as immersing oneself in pub culture, participating in sports, and adopting local fashion trends, reflects an individual's adaptation to and acceptance of the host society's social norms and lifestyle.

Each of these themes plays a crucial role in the identity transformation process, illustrating how immigrants navigate the complex landscape of retaining their original cultural identity while integrating into the host society. The forthcoming figure provides a visual representation of these themes, displaying a clear breakdown of the various elements that contribute to the sense of belonging and identity transformation among Malaysian immigrants in the United Kingdom. This exploration aims to shed light on the nuanced ways in which individuals forge their identities in the context of migration, influenced by a confluence of cultural, social, and personal factors.

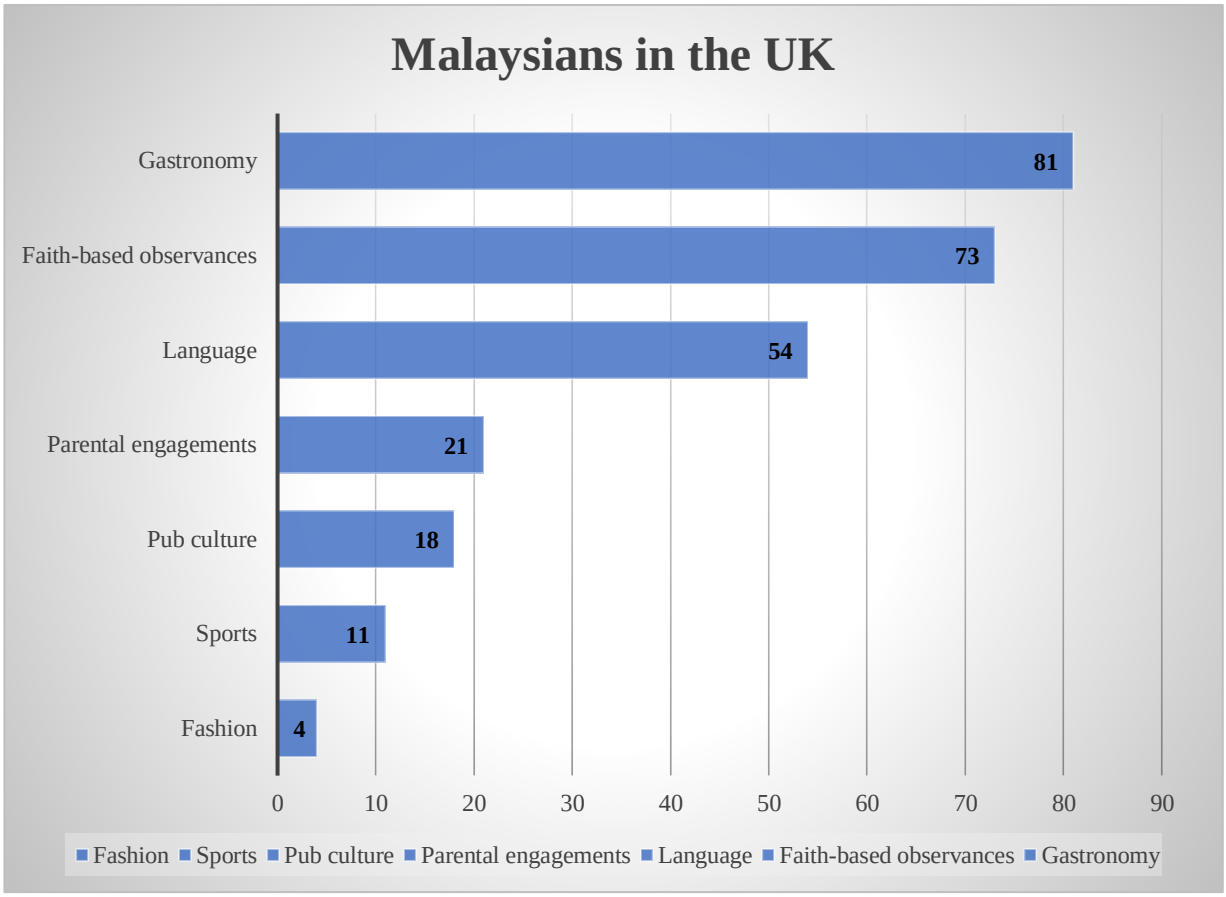

Figure 17: Malaysian social activities in the UK

5.2.1. Assimilation and integration

Language: **"fit in"**

Language proficiency is an essential factor in the assimilation and integration process. With Malaysia being a country with a diverse population, and English being one of its main languages, many Malaysians are fluent in English and speak it with a variety of accents (Mukherjee and David, 2011; Lee *et al.*, 2010; Li Chia Tay *et al*., 2016). The level of proficiency and range of accents are influenced by their primary languages, exposure to English-speaking environments, and their own personal interest or style of speaking (refer to sections 2.2.1, 3.3.3 and 4.4.1). While some Malaysians have a British accent due to their exposure to the British education system or British media, a majority of them have a more distinctive Malaysian accent. Although English is widely spoken in Malaysia, some Malaysian immigrants experience linguistic barriers when communicating with the wider British society, particularly when elements of comprehension or misunderstanding in relation to accents or expressions are concerned. Li Chia Tay *et al*. postulated in *Discourse Particles in Malaysian English: What Do They Mean?* that the English spoken by Malaysians "contains localized features that differ from the standardized form of English and, therefore, is largely unintelligible to people who are not from this geographic region" (2016: 480). For some, not only is English spoken in a non-standard form but it is also not their primary language, which can possibly result in limited social interaction and reduced opportunities for cultural exchange. Furthermore, my research reflects the linguistic challenges faced by Malaysian immigrants in the United Kingdom. Participants shared that the English language skills they developed in Malaysia, which were deemed proficient there, were often perceived as less proficient in the United Kingdom. This perception stems from the differences between Malaysian English and the standard British English spoken in the United Kingdom (Mukherjee & David, 2011). The immigrants reported feeling that their version of English was considered less fluent in the new cultural context. This linguistic discrepancy not only affects their communication but also their integration into British society. The immigrants' conscious efforts to adapt to standard English, while grappling with the perceived inadequacy of their Malaysian English, can significantly influence their sense of belonging and their identification with the notion of Britishness. In the exploration of the evolution of standard English, the analysis provided by Krishnan Kumar in *The making of English national identity* offers profound enlightenment:

> From about the fifteenth century onwards, the King's English of the English court, centred on London, was increasingly recognized as 'standard' English, though enormous variation existed in spelling and pronunciation. But with British expansion overseas, starting in the seventeenth century, the English language developed a variety of forms, a number of which gradually emerged as new standard forms (American English, Australian English, Caribbean English, South Asian English, etc.). 'British English', as a language and a literature, has had to compete with these other *Englishes* in the world at large. Even in its home territory, British English, traditionally identified with the speech patterns of the upper and upper-middle classes of south-east England, has in recent years found itself challenged by new or revived varieties, as in Mancunian, Glaswegian and 'Estuary' English, and the English spoken by new immigrant groups such as West Indians and South Asians. With British English embracing all these groups, many of which do not identify themselves as English, English as a badge of a specifically English national identity becomes increasingly problematic. (2003: 10-11)

Thus, the notion of "'standard'" English itself points out its role in marginalising non-standard speakers and dialects, reflecting broader societal inequalities. This perspective gains particular relevance when considering the experiences of Malaysian immigrants in the United Kingdom, as explored by Mukherjee and David (2011). Upon relocating, these individuals face a revaluation of their English proficiency; the competence recognised in Malaysia is scrutinised (as stated by the participants) in the United Kingdom due to the variances between Malaysian English and British English. This scenario resonates with Kumar's analysis as well as Paikeday's discussion on what constitutes an English native speaker (2003) (see 2.2.1), illustrating English as a fluid and evolving entity that reflects the historical, social, and cultural shifts. Such a viewpoint challenges the feasibility of a singular, static approach to language politics, emphasising the need to consider the diverse and diachronic changing nature of language itself.

When a study was carried out by the Commission for Racial Equality in 2005 on the definition of Britishness *(Citizenship & Belonging: What is Britishness?)*, it brought to light associations with concepts of holding a passport; the geography of the British Isles; national symbols; language, and cultural habits and behaviour, such as queuing and eating fish and chips. Furthermore, the study disclosed:

> Ethnic minority participants also drew on other sources of identification: religion (for Muslims only); ethnicity (region, country or continent of origins, and their associated cultures); and race or colour (for black Caribbean and black African participants only). These various identities became more or less salient in different situations. They were seen as being compatible with Britishness. (2005: 8)

This research elucidates that Britishness transcends mere national, religious, or cultural identifiers. As Johnson (2007: 8) posits, Britishness embodies a "civic identity", a concept that welcomes a spectrum of diversities and prioritises "values, not genes" (Marquand, 2009: 202). This conceptualisation prompts a reflection on the processes of assimilation and integration within British society. What are the prerequisites for transitioning from one's homeland to a foreign nation? The subsequent narratives offer a lens through which these questions can be explored.

> E10: There were a few occasions where some of my colleagues would make faces when I speak because they didn't understand me. So, I tried to improve myself and learn their accent… for me it was **fake it to fit in**.

> E04: I look like the British Asians here and I have a British accent now, so I'm treated like a "local". I wanted to **fit in** and not be treated like a foreigner or an immigrant, so I picked up the accent. I talk to a lot of British people, but also watch a lot of British English TV. So, I learned slang words, colloquialism, and use them in my everyday language to sound quite British. I immersed myself in the culture, the Britishness, learn about Britain and British people.

The narratives of E10 and E04 illustrate their efforts to adapt and assimilate into a new cultural context by modifying their accents, an act they deem necessary for social acceptance and effective communication. This adaptation process can be viewed through the lens of conscious deliberation and unconscious strategies, drawing parallels to the decision-making processes of experts and novices in complex situations discussed in the research by Mamede *et al.* in *Conscious thought beats deliberation without attention in diagnostic decision-making: at least when you are an expert* (2010). Although this study primarily focuses on medical professionals and students, its foundational principles can be extrapolated to understand the strategic decisions made by individuals in complex situations as they strive to assimilate and integrate

into British society. This connection suggests that, much like the skilled decision-making observed in medical experts, individuals navigating new social landscapes may also leverage a blend of deliberate thought and intuitive strategies to effectively adapt and integrate. E10 and E04's experiences reflect conscious adaptation strategies as they deliberately chose to modify their accents and learn local slang to better integrate into their new environment insofar as to avoid "faces" or being treated as "a foreigner or an immigrant". This mirrors the conscious deliberation in decision-making, where individuals actively engage with the problem, evaluate options, and decide on a course of action. According to Mamede *et al*., "conscious deliberation was superior to unconscious deliberation and […] the effect was strongest for complex cases" (2010: 589), suggesting, in my opinion, that E10 and E04's conscious efforts to adopt a new accent could be seen as a strategic response to the complexities of social integration and acceptance. On the other hand, individuals might also engage in unconscious or semi-conscious adaptation strategies, where changes in behaviour or speech patterns occur without deliberate effort. With the passage of time, individuals immersed in a new culture may unconsciously pick up local accents or colloquialisms, a process that can be likened to the unconscious deliberation in decision-making. While Mamede *et al.* found that "conscious deliberation" was generally "superior", there are scenarios where unconscious adaptation might occur seamlessly, facilitating integration without the individual's explicit awareness. The conscious effort to "fake it to fit in" suggests a strategic approach to overcome perceived barriers to acceptance, akin to problem-solving in complex decision-making scenarios. This effort reflects a deep desire for social integration and acceptance, highlighting the challenges individuals face when navigating new cultural landscapes. In contrast, unconscious adaptation might lead to a more organic form of integration, where individuals naturally assimilate aspects of the new culture over time. This process, while less deliberate, can also contribute to a sense of belonging and acceptance within the new community. By immersing herself in British culture and language, E04 seems to have adopted a more British identity as she is now "treated like a local" due to her appearance and accent.

Intriguingly, the phenomenon where about 22% of the participants, originally from Malaysia, are frequently mistaken for British-born Asians sheds light on the complexity of appearance, identity, and societal perceptions. This misidentification, while seemingly benign, can lead to frustration or feelings of limitation for these individuals, as it may trigger stereotypes or misconceptions, potentially overshadowing their unique cultural heritage. The data from the ONS 2011 Census, indicating that a significant portion of the foreign-born

population in the United Kingdom is categorised as Asian/Asian British, highlights the diversity within its Asian community. This diversity, in turn, might facilitate the blending in of Malaysian individuals, reducing their chances of being perceived as "outsiders" (E27) by the local population. E04's reference to feeling like a "local" suggests a deeper narrative of belonging and assimilation, hinting at the nuanced ways physical appearance and cultural cues contribute to perceptions of localness or foreignness. However, this blurring of cultural lines prompts a broader contemplation on identity and belonging. Should physical appearance and accent be the yardsticks for defining one's status as a "local" or an "outsider"? This question probes the delicate balance between embracing multiple cultural identities and the risk of feeling disconnected, marginalised and underrepresented. As I have explored in section 3.3.3, the examination of ethnocultural identity in British diaspora communities, particularly among Malaysian Chinese and Indian groups, reveals the challenges of cultural assimilation and identity recognition. Often misidentified based on their ancestral origins or conflated with broader Asian British categories, these communities' unique attributes—shaped by distinct histories, languages, and societal contexts—are overlooked. This oversimplification not only obscures their cultural nuances but also pushes them towards a struggle for visibility and distinct identity in the host land. As individuals navigate their multifaceted cultural landscapes, these experiences highlight the ongoing dialogue between personal identity and societal categorisations, inviting a re-examination of what it truly means to belong within a community.

The collected data from participants regarding their adoption of a British accent underscores a significant correlation with their assimilation and integration experiences. Over half of the participants acknowledged the adoption or attempt to adopt an English accent and local colloquialisms as strategies to meld into British society. They articulated a conscious effort to shift away from their "native way" of speaking (E22), "reduce [their] Malaysian English" (E39), and "tone down the Malaysian accent" (E11) in favour of "proper English" (E38), illustrating a deliberate modification of their linguistic expressions to enhance comprehensibility. Key phrases like "speak clearly" (E39), "speak slowly" (E16), and "pronounce properly" (E36) reflect a heightened awareness of potential communication barriers and a proactive approach to overcoming them, resonating with Mukherjee and David (2011) on the deliberate need to employ standard English (Mamede *et al.*, 2010). This linguistic adjustment is not merely about clarity but also about efficacy, particularly in professional and diverse sociolinguistic environments. The notion of "neutralising" their accent (E19, E65, and UA05) or adopting a *chameleon accent* (own quote) illustrates a nuanced strategy to navigate

and mitigate communication barriers, facilitating smoother and more efficient communication in varied settings. This linguistic adaptability reflects a broader narrative of cultural integration, where language shapes participants' experiences and interactions within their host society.

On the opposite end of this spectrum, there were participants who did not attempt to change their language use or adopt an accent in order to fit in with their new country of residence. Nearly half of them felt comfortable with their own language identity and did not feel the need to conform to sociolinguistic norms.

> E17: I never tried to force myself to blend in with the local culture. I'm still very proud to be a Malaysian and will not do things like faking a British accent, etc.

E17 appears to have a strong connection to his national identity, and his sense of pride of being a Malaysian is revealed. The use of the phrase "never tried to force myself to blend in" suggests that E17 has not felt the need to alter any form of behaviour or language to fit in with the local culture. The fact that E17 expressed his opposition to "faking a British accent" implies that he is determined not to change his current accent to suit the local culture, and that he wants to maintain his strong sense of Malaysian identity in the face of cultural pressures or expectations. Likewise, E32 and E19 are on the same boat in terms of assimilation and have declined to fit in by means of British accent acquisition. This strong attachment to their native language seems to amount to a form of patriotism, insofar as loyalty and attachment to one's country are tied to one's identity (Ratnam, 2019).

> E19: I've sort of given up on thinking that I will fit in a specific box, per se.

E19 has come to accept that he may not fit strictly into a particular sociocultural category. The expression "given up on thinking" implies that E19 may have previously wrestled with the pressure to conform to a particular societal niche. The term "a specific box" alludes to past challenges in adapting to certain sociocultural expectations, highlighting the ambiguity and fluidity inherent in defining these sociocultural categories. Moreover, there are those who never "acquired a British accent" (E11) and have "always had the same accent" (E21), contesting the superfluous nature of altering their accent to assimilate a British accent (E67 and E60). The absence of motivation to learn 'standard English' was understood as part of asserting their Malaysian identity, which mirrors the position of some members of the Malaysian diaspora in the United Kingdom. The extent to which Malaysian immigrants preserve their language and

accent or strive to assimilate by adopting the linguistic patterns of the majority reflects their connection with their host country. This relationship between language retention or adaptation and immigrants' sense of belonging or identity with their new environment is well-documented in sociolinguistic research. For instance, a study by Giles *et al*. in *Communication Accommodation Theory: Past accomplishments, current trends, and future prospects* (2023) introduces the Communication Accommodation Theory, which suggests that individuals adjust their speech style toward or away from their interlocutors to reduce or accentuate social differences, respectively.

In the context of Malaysian immigrants in the United Kingdom, those who strive to preserve their original language and accent may do so as a means of retaining a strong ethnocultural identity and connection to Malaysia. Conversely, those who seek to assimilate linguistically might view such adaptation as a pathway to better integration, acceptance, or even success in their new environment. This phenomenon is supported by other research indicating that accent and language proficiency can significantly influence social integration, employment opportunities, and perceptions of identity (Derwing & Munro, 2009). Furthermore, evidence from studies like those conducted by Berry (2008) on the integration-adaptation model shows that language acquisition and accent adaptation are crucial components of the acculturation process, impacting immigrants' well-being and social networks in the host country. These studies underline the interplay between language use, identity, and the perceived relationship with the host society among Malaysian immigrants, illustrating how linguistic choices are intertwined with broader sociocultural dynamics. According to Fernández-Reino, 89% of the foreign-born living in the United Kingdom reported that they had a good grasp of the English language in the 2011 census, with 51% further reporting that they had English as their main language (The Migration Observatory, 2019). The statistics reflect a trend in terms of English language proficiency among the foreign-born population in the United Kingdom, indicating that there is little obstacle to communication and integration for the majority of this population. Still, the fact that only 51% consider English as their main language implies that linguistic diversity and multilingualism still exist within the foreign-born community, underscoring the presence of diverse sociolinguistic and cultural backgrounds in British society. For "without a shared language and intercultural skills, there can be no conversation and people cannot work and live together […] there is almost no society" (Loobuyck, 2016: 240), emphasises the importance of language and interculturality in

fostering social cohesion and enabling effective interaction between individuals from diverse backgrounds.

The participant narratives above have highlighted the complex interconnection between cultural immersion and shaping one's identity, physical appearance, language, and sense of belonging. The analysis sheds light on critical issues regarding how individuals are perceived based on their physical appearance and linguistic backgrounds. It highlights the challenges they face when they are mistaken for members of different communities, underscoring the pressure to assimilate into the majority culture and customs to achieve inclusion, or distinguishing themselves as a visible community—a dichotomy between blending in and standing out. While some participants express a desire to adopt a British accent and assimilate into "the majority cultural identity" (Race, 2015: 19), others prefer to retain their Malaysian accent, embracing it as an expression of their 'authentic' selves and a form of resistance against prevailing cultural norms. This stance resonates with Ratnam's notion of demonstrating loyalty and belonging to one's nation through "devotion or faithfulness, regarded as a noble quality" (2019: 4) and aligns with the intent to "differentiate themselves from majority group members" (Weiner and Richards, 2009: 116). Such a choice challenges the conventional criteria for being classified as a "native speaker", which Gates argues is not solely about "conformity to the language conventions of the group" (in Paikeday, 2003: 18). Although certain linguistic errors might lead to being perceived as foreign, achieving native speaker status involves more than just linguistic accuracy. These varied perspectives among participants illustrate the diverse strategies for cultural assimilation and integration, and that there is no one single way of negotiating and reframing cultural diversities.

Social integration: Faith-based observances, parental engagement, pub culture, sports, gastronomy, and fashion

Adapting to a new country and its environment may be an exhilarating experience for migrants, which can also be daunting at the same time. For Malaysian immigrants in the United Kingdom, the experiences may range from positive integration to a whole range of challenges, including living in a very different climate, coping with geographical distance, negotiating cultural and social exchanges, adapting to a new lifestyle, and so forth. These experiences do influence their sense of familiarity as well as unfamiliarity, leading them to embark upon learning and adaptation processes in order to integrate and succeed in this new environment. Recognising the unique characteristics of both Malaysia and the United Kingdom as

multicultural societies offers a plethora of opportunities for cultural exchange and integration. Engaging in diverse multicultural events and social activities provides a fertile ground for fostering unity, bridging cultural gaps, and promoting cohesion among different communities. Furthermore, some of the ways in which Malaysian immigrants integrate into British society are by staying informed about mainstream British culture through various channels, such as media and fashion. They also engage in socialisation by participating in social clubs, events, and activities, which further enhances their connection to and understanding of their new environment.

While many of the participants have shared their experiences regarding the numerous avenues for integration, they have equally expressed how their identity is closely tied to their Malaysian culture and ethnicity, and they seek ways to maintain a connection with their family heritage as well as national or community traditions. However, maintaining a connection with one's native cultural heritage in a foreign country is not without its challenges. Although the United Kingdom is a society with different cultural influences, finding spaces and communities where one's own sociocultural traditions are appreciated and celebrated may not be an easy task. As a result, many Malaysian immigrants have formed their own communities and networks, often focusing on shared interests. For example, the participants have mentioned their participation in cultural events and festivals organised by the High Commission of Malaysia in London, feasting on traditional Malaysian cuisine, as well as conversing in their national and native languages. The community networks formed by Malaysian immigrants are more than just social groups; they are essential lifelines that tether individuals to their homeland, providing a sanctuary where their cultural identity is not just recognised but celebrated. For those navigating the challenging waters of displacement and the ensuing identity ambiguity that often accompanies migration, these networks offer a semblance of home in a foreign land. Engaging in cultural practices, whether through cuisine, language, or festivals, allows them to anchor their identity in familiar traditions while adapting to a new cultural milieu. This engagement is not a one-way street; it is a reciprocal exchange where local British culture and the diverse traditions of the Malaysian diaspora intersect, creating a dynamic cultural hybridity. Explored in section 3.2.1, the concept of "ethnoscapes" as introduced by Appadurai (1990) signifies this fluidity and the constant shaping and reshaping of cultural identities through these interactions. By partaking in both local (British) and global (Malaysian/Asian) cultural spheres, Malaysian immigrants exemplify a form of cultural negotiation, forging a distinct identity that straddles their Malaysian heritage and their life in

the United Kingdom. This hybrid identity does not dilute their Malaysian essence; instead, it enriches it, adding layers of international experiences and interactions, thus weaving a new, intricate pattern into the social fabric of their host communities.

Faith-based observances, parental engagement, pub culture and sports

Creating their *own space* by means of different roles in British society is another important mechanism for immigrants. By embracing the new culture and building connections with the locals, immigrants can establish a sense of belonging and thus thrive in their new country of residence. Many Malaysian immigrants engage in social events to be part of the community that they have become members of. These include joining colleagues at pubs or bars after work; inviting neighbours over for dinner; participating in children's school bakes and activities; actively participating in church events; and engaging in sports activities, to name a few examples.

> E01: I tend to go out for drinks after work once in a while with both Malaysian and non-Malaysian friends.
>
> E25: I would just hang out with friends, go for dinners. Go out for drinks. I have a melting pot of friends.
>
> E19: I'm more than happy to go with my mates to the pub for a pint of beer, [who are] of different nationalities, but also Malaysians.

Most participants claim to have a vivid social life, and for some, actively participate in social events. These excerpts exhibit a willingness to socialise and spend time with friends who are both Malaysians and of "different nationalities" (E19). Their positive attitude towards active integration implies a desire to connect with people from different cultural backgrounds. The afterwork gathering implies a relaxed atmosphere outside the workplace as a common social activity among colleagues, as a way to go beyond the work context and to forge new friendships. E25's use of the expression "a melting pot of friends" suggests that he enjoys being in the company of people regardless of their cultural background in casual social settings. Thomas Thurnell-Read in *'It's a small little pub, but everybody knew everybody': Pub culture, belonging and social change* posits:

> Talking about pub going, then, was a means to explore and express dynamic feelings of belonging and attachment, particularly where they arise at the

> intersection of personal life changes and wider social transformations. (2024: 431)

Thus, pub culture, as discussed by Thurnell-Read, and the socialisation patterns of the Malaysian immigrant both illustrate the dynamic process of establishing belonging and identity through social interactions, albeit in different cultural contexts. These interactions serve as a microcosm of the larger processes of cultural adaptation and integration, reflecting how personal life changes and broader social transformations influence one's sense of belonging and identity. Claiming to have an open mind and expressing the desire to socialise with diverse friends seemingly reveal an acceptance of multiculturalism, not only on the part of the Malaysian immigrant himself but also on the part of his non-Malaysian acquaintances. The process of integration for immigrants often unfolds across a continuum of strategies that span from "conscious deliberation" to "unconscious deliberation", as discussed earlier (Mamede *et al*., 2010: 589). This continuum encapsulates strategies from proactive, intentional efforts to more passive or subconscious attitudes. In other words, it encompasses a range from deliberate, mindful actions to subtler, less conscious forms of engagement with the host culture. These strategies are crucial in determining how immigrants adapt to and become part of their new environment. Deliberate, conscious strategies of integration are active efforts made by immigrants to assimilate into the host culture. Adopting the English pub culture, as highlighted in the context of Malaysian immigrants in the United Kingdom, is a prime example of such a strategy. By actively participating in a quintessential aspect of British social life, immigrants are making a conscious decision to immerse themselves in local customs and practices. This not only facilitates social connections with locals but also serves as a platform for cultural exchange and understanding. For, according to Thurnell-Read:

> Pubs represent important and dynamic social spaces, not least in being prime examples of what Oldenburg (1989) has termed 'third spaces', those other than work and home, where people meet and interact in varied and socially significant ways. (2024: 423)

The concept of pubs as "'third spaces'" and the active engagement of immigrants in these environments encapsulate the process of cultural exchange, integration, and the creation of new social identities. These deliberate strategies often require a level of intentionality and effort from the immigrants, as they may involve stepping out of their comfort zones to embrace new cultural norms.

Passive or unconscious integration strategies involve immigrants naturally absorbing local customs and language through routine interactions, like E19's casual pub visits with friends or E01's after-work drinks, without deliberate efforts to assimilate. While these subtle forms of integration can foster a more authentic assimilation over time, they may lead to a slower integration process and potential isolation. In contrast, active strategies, such as participating in pub culture, can quickly build a sense of community and belonging but may feel forced or inauthentic, especially for those uncomfortable with (or unable to participate in) certain local practices, such as drinking alcohol. While pub culture is undeniably central to the British social scene, serving as popular gathering spots for locals to mingle, socialise, and relax, it is important to recognise the diversity in venues where people engage in social drinking across the United Kingdom, particularly in cosmopolitan areas like London. Thurnell-Read notes:

> [T]he growth of niche real ale and craft beer venues such as brewery tap rooms (Wallace, 2019), 'micropubs' (Hubbard, 2017) and events such as beer festivals (Thurnell-Read, 2017a, 2017b) and 'real ale trails' (Thurnell-Read et al., 2021) further diversified the drinking landscape. (2024: 422)

The diversification of the drinking landscape with niche venues like "brewery tap rooms" and "micropubs", reflects a broader trend where traditional pubs now exist alongside a variety of specialised establishments like wine bars and microbreweries. This diversification caters to a range of preferences and social scenes, indicating a shift beyond traditional pubs and towards more personalised and varied drinking experiences that meet the diverse interests and tastes of different social groups. These alternatives to pubs exemplify the varied landscape of social venues in Britain, offering different atmospheres, culinary experiences, and types of social interaction. The emphasis on drinking as a social activity extends beyond the confines of pubs, reflecting the social scene in the United Kingdom. Engaging in such local, idiosyncratic activities suggests an effort to discover, understand and accept the host culture, particularly when individuals are not accustomed to the drinking culture. This is illustrated by E14, who adapted to the local custom by starting to drink alcohol, despite "never" doing so previously. Similarly, E37, who initially equated "going for drinks" with coffee, later came to understand its local connotation of consuming alcohol. This cultural nuance might inadvertently marginalise those who abstain from alcohol, potentially limiting their social interactions within the community, as possibly experienced by individuals like E70, E21, and S07. This aspect will be examined in section 5.2.2.

Almost 20% of the participants have stated that frequenting the pub or the local bar on a regular basis was a way to socialise and forge strong bonds with people, with some claiming to be a "very social person" (S06), indicating their natural inclination to try and meet people and thus revealing that this activity can be seen as a deliberate effort to navigate their way into integration. What has been revealed through the interviews is the importance of socialising as a means of developing social connections and integrating into a community. The fact that only about 20% of the participants identified going to the pub as their preferred socialising method suggests that this venue might not be as popular among them for social engagement. Another possible explanation is that not all participants mentioned their frequenting the pub, either because it is not part of the popular culture in Malaysia, or because they omitted sharing this information. Thurnell-Read theorises:

> [T]he biggest shift has been towards domestic alcohol consumption meaning that, while many maintain a 'traditional drinking' habitus focused on evenings and weekend visits to pubs, a 'home drinking' habitus involving 'consumption of wine in regular, moderate amounts throughout the week, often with meals and as part of domestic and family life' typifies an increasing number of people's relationships with alcohol (Brierley-Jones *et al*., 2014: 1059). (2024: 422)

The theory about the omission of pub frequenting among participants, potentially due to cultural differences or personal choice, ties into a broader discussion about changing alcohol consumption habits, as highlighted by Brierley-Jones *et al*. (in Thurnell-Read, 2024). This connection reflects varying cultural norms and personal preferences in how individuals engage with alcohol. The shift towards domestic alcohol consumption indicates a transformation in social and cultural practices related to drinking. This shift from a public "'traditional drinking' habitus", characterised by social drinking in pubs during specific times, to a "'home drinking' habitus", where alcohol consumption is integrated into daily domestic and family life, suggests a broader change in the social role of alcohol. Connecting this to the potential reasons why some Malaysian immigrants might not mention frequenting pubs, one can consider the cultural context of Malaysia, where alcohol is not as central to social life as it might be in other countries. The social norms in Malaysia around alcohol consumption can influence the drinking habits of its people, even when they are abroad. Thus, the absence of pub-going in their narratives could reflect either a cultural disposition or a personal preference that aligns more with the emerging trend of home drinking. Furthermore, the shift towards home drinking can

be seen as part of a broader trend of individualisation and privatisation of leisure activities. For immigrants, adapting to a new cultural environment might involve aligning with the local drinking habits, which could be more oriented towards home consumption, especially in contexts where pub culture is not predominant. Whether in the context of adapting to a new culture or aligning with changing trends, these factors collectively influence how individuals choose to engage with drinking, be it in public "third spaces" or within the privacy of their homes.

The notion of strategy in the context of socialising for integration implies, yet again, a conscious or natural inclination toward actions that foster connections within a new community. When some immigrants actively choose to engage in social activities, such as frequenting pubs or participating in community events, they are employing a deliberate strategy to cultivate relationships and a sense of belonging in their new environment (Mamede *et al.*, 2010). This strategic approach to socialising suggests that some of them are naturally inclined towards building social connections in an active and deliberate manner for integration, in a space where "a sense of belonging together and solidarity can evolve even in the absence of a shared national or cultural identity" (Loobuyck, 2016: 231). This strategic engagement in social spaces offers a pathway to integration that leverages shared human experiences and interactions, rather than relying solely on cultural or national commonalities.

Joining a sports club can also play a part in fostering a sense of community belonging, and it is among the diverse ways by which the participants have had an opportunity to try and integrate. Sports are taken as a social activity focusing not on improving sporting skills, but rather on the social interaction and amusement between the locals and the immigrant community. 12% of the participants have stated their involvement in sporting events and activities as a means to "expand on social life" (E19).

> E19: You need to be networking with other people. And for me, it's always been sports: racquet; squash, any sports. By having sports activities, I find that it's a lot easier to start assimilating and start making friends.

> E64: I'm very sporty, and I thought that the best thing for me to do is to join a sports group. And I joined the local gay volleyball and softball teams. That's where my first circle of international friends actually came about.

The accounts of E19 and E64 illustrate how sports function as a strategic and potent tool for networking, assimilation, and the forging of new friendships within a foreign cultural landscape. E19 highlights the significance of networking, pointing out how the communal and interactive essence of sports creates a conducive environment for immigrants and locals to connect in a casual, informal setting. The use of the word "assimilating" is a crucial aspect in terms of his personal and professional life, believing that incorporating sports in one's life can be a starting point towards building friendships. On a similar note, E64's involvement in sports offers a glimpse into how specific sports communities can provide a sense of identity and belonging, as his participation in gay volleyball and softball teams links him with individuals who share similar social and personal identities. This not only fosters personal connections but also illustrates how sports serve as an entry point to more niche communities, enriching the integration experience. Additionally, the narratives of E19 and E64 demonstrate that sports go beyond mere physical activity; they become a social catalyst, extending their influence beyond the playing field to foster a supportive network and camaraderie. The experiences of E19 and E64 exemplify how "the consciousness of shared interests and engagement" in fitness and exercise significantly contributes to building and expanding social networks, as noted by Loobuyck (2016: 231). Their active involvement in local sports is not just a means to socialise but also a strategic form of cultural assimilation. This engagement provides immigrants with a deeper understanding of the host country's recreational life, customs, and social norms, underscoring the role of sports in facilitating integration and fostering a sense of community.

In the United Kingdom, the LGBTQ+ community has witnessed considerable progress in terms of rights and societal acceptance. The decriminalisation of homosexuality began in 1967 in England and Wales, followed by Scotland and Northern Ireland, Hubbard and Griffiths indicate in *Sexual offence, diagnosis, and activism: A British history of LGBTIQ psychology*:

> In 1967, the Sexual Offences Act was passed in England and Wales. This act decriminalized (homo)sexual behavior between two men over the age of 21 in private (excluding those in the Armed Forces or Merchant Navy). Scotland passed a similar Act in 1980 and Northern Ireland passed one in 1982. (2019: 945)

The nation has introduced several protective measures, such as the Equality Act 2010, which outlaws discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation and gender identity. According to the 2021 Census, the voluntary census question on sexual orientation, which was asked of

individuals aged 16 and over, received responses from 44.9 million people, representing 92.5% of the targeted demographic. Of those who responded, approximately 43.4 million, or 89.4%, identified as straight or heterosexual. About 1.5 million respondents, accounting for 3.2% of the population, identified with an LGBTQ+ orientation, selecting options like "Gay or Lesbian", "Bisexual", or "Other sexual orientation". The remaining 3.6 million people, or 7.5% of the population, chose not to answer the question. However, this raises the question of whether polling and census data fully reflect the actual situation, as there might be under-reporting issues, suggesting that the actual percentage of the population identifying with an LGBTQ+ orientation could be more than 1.5 million. In the United Kingdom, there are well-established LGBT rights organisations and substantial LGBT communities, particularly notable in Brighton, often referred to as the unofficial "gay capital". Nick McGlynn explains in *Slippery geographies of the urban and the rural: Public sector LGBT equalities work in the shadow of the 'Gay Capital'*:

> Brighton is not felt to be safe simply because it is urban or because it is a city – instead, the unique geographic and cultural specificity of Brighton, the 'gay capital', contributes to feelings of a space where LGBT people will 'obviously' be safe and, simultaneously, such feelings of LGBT safety work to construct this imaginary of Brighton. (2018: 74)

Brighton's reputation as a "'gay capital'" contributes to its perception as a safe space for the LGBTQ+ community, not merely due to its urban setting, but because of its unique cultural and geographic characteristics. This perception enhances Brighton's image as a safe haven for this community. Similarly, London and other major cities host significant LGBTQ+ communities, reinforcing their roles as inclusive urban spaces. While the United Kingdom has made significant headway, issues persist, particularly concerning transgender rights.

On the contrary, Malaysia's LGBTQ+ community faces more stringent challenges. The criminalisation of homosexuality, strict law enforcement, and absence of anti-discrimination protections mark a tough landscape, as "public receptivity continues to be influenced by religion and cultural norms about gender and sexuality, and how these norms are practiced by the ethnic groups that the LGBT participants belong to" (Jerome *et al*., 2021: 381). Indeed, the predominant religion, Islam, largely condemns homosexuality, shaping both public policies and societal norms. Despite a restrictive environment, gay culture thrives, bolstered by social networks, and as noted by Jerome *et al*. in *Public Receptivity Towards LGBT in Recent Times*

Malaysia: LGBT Perspectives: "some segments of the public have shown receptivity towards LGBT as evidenced by the fans and followers of local social media LGBT figures" (2021: 381). The situation for LGBTQ+ individuals in Malaysia is precarious, with potential for abrupt changes and hostility. Activist groups strive for rights advancement, confronting significant governmental opposition. Research in Malaysia predominantly examines LGBTQ+ issues through lenses like STIs (Sexually transmitted infections) risks and experiences mainly in Kuala Lumpur, highlighting challenges related to stigma, healthcare access, and social support within the community (Tan *et al*., 2021). This likely explains why many individuals from this community, like E64, move to countries with more liberal policies on LGBTQ+ rights, searching for open, safer and more accepting conditions.

With the aim of expanding social networks, many of the participants have been involved in their children's school activities, charity drives and/or church activities. In sections 2.2.1, 2.2.3, 2.2.4, and 2.3.6, I have explored Malaysia's religious diversity, illustrating how the coexistence of Islam, Buddhism, Christianity, and Hinduism has profoundly shaped the nation's culture, society, and politics. These faiths foster and shape community customs, establishing societal standards and contributing to the country's distinct multicultural identity. Drawing parallels with the United Kingdom, the broad spectrum of religious beliefs, including Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, Sikhism, and Judaism, draws attention to the universal value of religious diversity, enriching cultural narratives, shaping social interactions, and steering public discourse, reflecting a global embrace of religious pluralism. Focusing on the church aspect, in Malaysia, church mainly signifies Christian congregations across a variety of denominations like Catholic, Anglican, and Methodist, particularly in East Malaysia (Northern Borneo) and among diverse ethnic communities. The church landscape in the United Kingdom is diverse and expansive, with the Church of England serving as the foundational state church and representing close to half of the population identifying as "Christians", based on the 2021 ONS Census. This is complemented by an array of other denominations, creating a mosaic of religious expression. Among these, according to the 2021 ONS Census, Anglicanism prevails, with Roman Catholicism, Presbyterianism, Methodism, and Baptism also significantly represented, showcasing the nation's deep-rooted Christian heritage. In *Religion and social capital: Examining social networks and religious identification in the UK*, Adam Gemar explores the intersection of religion and social networks, referencing Putnam and Hirschman to highlight the salience of religious participation in societal contexts.

> Putnam (2000) argued for religious participation as a prominent source of social capital. But while, for instance, Hirschman (2004) found that religious participation provided resources for immigrant communities to shelter from hostilities of broader society and a space from which to succeed. (2024: 26)

These churches, beyond being spiritual havens, serve as important community hubs in both countries, promoting education, charity, and social cohesion, thereby playing a crucial role in their respective societal and cultural frameworks.

These participants, while not specifying their congregation or denomination, have shared that being part of these religious communities significantly aids their integration and sense of belonging. This involvement accentuates the vital role religious institutions play in fostering personal and communal identity, offering a supportive network that enhances the assimilation process in a multicultural setting. Many of the female participants are also mothers, who account for 66% of the total female participants. And part of their narratives focused on how important they felt it was to ensure that they took part actively in school activities.

> E14: I take part in social activities to show that I am part of the society. I took part in a lot of school stuff, engage other mums in mother and toddler groups. I met parents, have coffees in their house, take part in celebrations, do some charity, fundraising things… all those things.

> E40: Socialise, get involved with the locals. It helped a great deal having made friends while raising a child here. Always volunteer in school, church or charity drives.

Both E14 and E40 are part of the 22% of mothers who advocate the importance of socialising and being an active member of the local community, particularly the school community. They indicate that their involvement in social activities, such as volunteering, spending time with other parents, and participating in charity and fundraising events, can help build a sense of belonging and foster a feeling of being part of the community. By getting "involved with the locals" (E40) in various activities and events, there is an opportunity to learn more about the local culture and customs, and to promote social integration. Furthermore, such involvement may allow them to feel that they are contributing to their community, which could provide a sense of purpose and fulfilment. This affirms Smyrl's definition of a "good citizen" in *Citizens and good citizens: Reflections on an element of American identity*, wherein "socially and

politically" "acceptable behaviour" is often characterised by the act of contributing to the community through charities or engaging in community services, which implies meaningful and beneficial actions that bring value to the community (in Motard, 2013: 95). In addition, forging friendships "while raising a child" (E40) in the new country of residence provides mothers and families with a support network and resources for parenting advice. Although I was hopeful about getting more male perspectives and insight on their involvement as fathers in children's school activities, only one shared his proactiveness in this regard (E19). The absence of fathers mentioning school activities is telling; it could stem from a lack of engagement or interest in these events, or perhaps fathers simply did not disclose such involvement during the interview process. This disinterest might hint at a more patriarchal perspective within the sample, especially considering it comprises both women and men, with men showing lesser involvement. My interpretation of this occurrence is based on the nature of the questions about social activities and the distribution of female, male, and gender-unassigned participants in the study. Acknowledging these factors is essential because they could introduce bias, which is carefully considered and duly acknowledged in the interpretation of the results.

Gastronomy

Learning about and immersing oneself in British culture are stimulating factors for many immigrants who want to feel that they belong in their new country of residence and make it their home. With the passage of time, many Malaysian immigrants feel that "the British culture fits with [their] personality" (E13). The narratives have thus far emphasised the advantage and value of socialisation and the function of social venues, such as pubs, bars, sports clubs, neighbours' homes, schools and places of worship, empowering the participants in establishing social connections, community integration, and cohesion. However, do these attempts at integration, which for some might involve assimilation, suggest a diminished affiliation with their Malaysian identity and culture? How do they manage to preserve their own cultural heritage while also embracing British culture, assuming they wish to maintain a balance between the two? In exploring whether the participants retained any Malaysian habits or practices post-migration, such as through Malaysian cuisine, customs, and traditions, 98% of the participants shared insights into their experiences with maintaining these cultural elements. All of them spoke about enjoying Malaysian cuisine, retaining the Malaysian sense of hospitality, maintaining traditions and customs, and celebrating Malaysian festivals. One participant articulated that she had not given up wearing "ethnic clothes", among other habits.

> UA09: I still wear my ethnic clothes, cook Malaysian food regularly and celebrate religious festivals.

Similarly to what most participants expressed, this interviewee revealed her strong attachment to her cultural heritage and traditional practices, as well as a sense of pride. The fact that she continues to wear ethnic clothes suggests a longing to stay connected with her cultural roots, and perhaps also a way not to lose or forget that connection. Value is placed on the birth country's cuisine, which may also indicate that she enjoys sharing it with others. This is highly probable as at least 90% of those who maintain Malaysian cooking traditions have also put a strong emphasis on meals as a way of interacting with others and sharing their culture through food: "making sure guests are always fed with [my] Malaysian food" (UA04).

The celebration of religious festivals is another aspect that 80% of participants underline as important moments in their lives in the United Kingdom, signifying the importance of faith and traditions for Malaysian immigrants. As discussed in Chapter 2.2, when pointing to the multireligious composition of Malaysia, it is observed that religion plays an important part in the lives of Malaysians and is widely practised in the host country. Each religious community has its own rituals and celebrations, as elaborated in section 3.3.3. These include *Hari Raya Aidilfitri*, which marks the end of Ramadan, the Islamic holy month of fasting; Chinese New Year, celebrated by the Malaysian Chinese community to usher in the lunar new year with traditions steeped in cultural heritage; and *Deepavali*, known as the Festival of Lights, observed by the Malaysian Indian community, symbolising the victory of light over darkness. These festivities, among others, serve as a poignant connection to their Malaysian roots, allowing them to retain and cherish their cultural identity even when residing overseas. Additionally, these celebrations resonate with the broader Muslim, Chinese, and Indian communities in the United Kingdom, creating multicultural engagement and exchange. For instance, *Hari Raya Aidilfitri*, also known as *Eid al-Fitr*, is celebrated not only by Malaysians but also by the wider Muslim community coming together in a spirit of unity and festivity. Similarly, Chinese New Year and *Deepavali* become focal points of celebration for the Chinese and Indian diasporas, respectively, transcending geographical and cultural boundaries to foster a sense of community and shared traditions. This multicultural observance not only enriches the cultural landscape of the nation but also provides a sense of belonging and cultural continuity for the Malaysian diaspora. In addition, there are other types of celebrations that are secular, including national holidays. E43 stated her sense of pride of identifying as a Malaysian, specifically on Malaysian

national day. E43 explained how she would cook Malaysian cuisine and invite friends over for a feast; singing the "Malaysian national anthem" was part of the celebration.

All of these participants have unanimously stressed the importance of food in their culture. Organising gatherings with family and friends around food is significant, whether at home, in restaurants, or during festivals. I describe Malaysian cuisine as a *hybrid culinary culture*, a term that encapsulates a culinary fusion that integrates various food traditions and methods, mirroring Malaysia's ethnic diversity. This gastronomic amalgamation represents the interlinking of Malay, Chinese, Indian, and indigenous culinary influences, creating a distinct and unified Malaysian culinary identity. Through this blend, the plethora of flavours and cooking techniques of Malaysia's different communities come together, showcasing the nation's cultural harmony and culinary innovation. Lee in *Malaysian identities and mélange food cultures* suggests that this shared culinary culture acts as an element across diverse ethnicities, with shared cuisine serving as a commonality that unites individuals from various backgrounds and places them on an equal footing through the "integrated sense of taste and a collective sense of identity" for Malaysians (2017: 141). In the diaspora, such as in the United Kingdom, the *hybrid culinary culture* of Malaysia serves as a reminder of home for expatriates, acting as a cultural bridge that connects them with their heritage and with each other, despite the distance from their homeland. The act of preparing, sharing, and enjoying Malaysian cuisine abroad becomes a ritual through which they affirm their identity and strengthen community ties, fostering a sense of belonging and unity among Malaysians overseas. Following on from this, Malaysian cuisine operates as the "Third Space" in Malaysia, where people feel a sense of connection with each other, permeating ethnocultural differences (Bhabha, 1994). While many have said that they cooked and ate at home, they have also indicated that they occasionally visit Malaysian restaurants nearby. One example is "frequent[ing] Malaysia Hall to get our Malaysian food craving fixed" (E26). Malaysia Hall Canteen, a restaurant situated in London, subsidised by the Malaysian government, was open only to Malaysian nationals, but now appears to have closed down permanently. There are numerous restaurants serving Malaysian cuisine throughout the United Kingdom, as well as carnivals and events organised by the High Commission of Malaysia or other associations, which are often meeting places for Malaysians.

Food is perceived as the best "platform for the construction of a shared Malaysian identity", gathering people to "eat in the same place regardless of their religious and cultural background" (Faizah, 2015: 32). Malaysian food culture is not just about the diverse dishes

Malaysians enjoy, but also a reflection of their identity. Food identity is deeply intertwined with their cultural heritage. The outcome from participants' narratives is a testament to this identity, linking Malaysian food, national and ethnocultural identity, which suggests a strong sense of pride and patriotism in relation to maintaining their roots. The fidelity to Malaysian food signifies loyalty to their cultural heritage, demonstrating how food is an integral part of who they are as Malaysians, as E21 avows, "if not for food, I don't know how Malaysian I could feel". The diversity of Malaysian food reflects the multicultural fabric of this society, and the fidelity to these culinary traditions reinforces their ethnocultural identity. S07's statement, "I've come to appreciate Malaysia's collectivist culture a lot", reveals a deepened understanding and respect for the aspects of Malaysian society that prioritise group harmony and collective well-being over individual pursuits. This appreciation for the "collectivist culture" indicates an acknowledgment of the values that underpin social interactions and community life in Malaysia, where the emphasis is on mutual support, shared responsibilities, and the interconnectedness of individuals within the community. S07's perspective suggests a recognition of the benefits of such a culture, including enhanced social cohesion, a robust sense of belonging, and the fostering of strong community ties that together contribute to a supportive and interconnected social fabric. This acknowledgment highlights a shift or deepening in S07's understanding, appreciating how collective efforts and communal values shape individual experiences and contribute to the overall well-being of society.

Following her 2023 multi-award winnings for Best Actress in *Everything Everywhere All at Once*, Malaysian-born star Michelle Yeoh shared a list of her favourite Malaysian dishes at the start of her interview at the homecoming news conference in Malaysia. As part of a collectivist culture, food is a crucial part of ethnocultural identity demonstrating Yeoh's loyalty to her native cuisine and Malaysian roots, despite her international success. Her success highlights the increasing global diversity, showing that talent transcends national and cultural boundaries. For participants like E65 and S02, along with numerous others in the study, there is a notable intensification of their engagement with food and traditions while living abroad. They describe these cultural expressions as "more exaggerated" and "amplified in a good way", indicating that these practices become more prominent and perhaps even more cherished when they are away from their homeland. This heightened expression is not just for their own benefit but is also driven by "a sense of duty to share [their] culture" with those in their new environment. This sense of duty suggests that these individuals see themselves as ambassadors of their heritage, responsible for sharing and preserving it. The amplification of cultural

traditions and practices in the diaspora context is a symptom of their deep cultural pride and a proactive response to the risk of cultural dilution, demonstrating a commitment to maintaining and celebrating their identity and values in a foreign setting. As Perry summarises in *Feasting on Culture and Identity: Food Functions in a Multicultural and Transcultural Malaysia*:

> Food creates multicultural communities and provides a national identity as the hybrid Third Space that allows different ethnicities to congregate together and celebrate their differences. (2017: 198)

Their need to share and promote their heritage and food is a way to connect with others for a greater understanding and appreciation of their culture in the "Third Space", both from the inner perspective of the Malaysian community and their new space in British society. The Malaysian community in London vividly showcases its hybrid ethnocultural identity through its culinary traditions, especially during festive celebrations. For example, during *Hari Raya Aidilfitri*, *Nasi Lemak*—a fragrant rice dish cooked in coconut milk and pandan leaf—is a quintessential favourite. *Roti Canai*, a type of flatbread, is often enjoyed as a hearty breakfast or snack and is particularly associated with the Tamil Muslim community in Malaysia, reflecting the country's multiethnic composition. *Laksa*, Laksa, a spicy noodle soup, is a hallmark of Peranakan or Nyonya cuisine, which arose from the intermingling of early Chinese migrants and local Malays in Penang, Malacca, Singapore, and Indonesia. This dish epitomises the fusion of Chinese, Malay, Javanese, and South Indian flavours, showcasing the cultural mosaic of the Peranakan community. In London, these dishes are relatively accessible thanks to a number of Malaysian restaurants and food stalls scattered across the city. Establishments like Roti King, Tukdin and Laksamania flaunt these traditional dishes, making them readily available for both Malaysians craving a taste of home and locals keen on exploring Malaysian cuisine. However, while these foods are accessible in specific areas known for their culinary diversity, they may not be as easily found in less cosmopolitan neighbourhoods, posing a challenge for those seeking authentic Malaysian fare. Sharing these traditional dishes serves as a powerful medium for Malaysians in maintaining their cultural identity and fostering a sense of community. By introducing British friends or colleagues to their cuisine, they not only share a piece of their heritage but also create opportunities for cultural exchange and mutual understanding. This act of sharing food goes beyond mere hospitality; it becomes a statement of identity and a demonstration of cultural interaction, illustrating how food can be a bridge between diverse cultures.

Although Malaysian immigrants largely cherish their cultural heritage, the length of their residency in the United Kingdom may carry certain repercussions over time.

> S07: I definitely retain everything, though perhaps not as strongly as I would in Malaysia.
>
> S04: We maintain our Malaysian habits, but we also apply British customs, and assimilate. For example, we do not go to friends' house without notifying them first.

These narratives indicate that they have taken steps to preserve aspects of their Malaysian cultural identity, while also adapting to "British customs" (S04). While S07 acknowledges that she continues to maintain her Malaysian habits, it is however not to the same degree as before. This could be due to her adaptation process and the influence of the local culture. The practice of S04 notifying friends before visiting highlights their assimilation into British culture, where such prior notifications are standard, unlike in Malaysia, where unannounced guests are still warmly welcomed. These participants signal a desire through "cultural consciousness" (Kapur-Dromson, 2007: preface x) to maintain a sense of continuity with their past that "bear[s] traces and connection of the past" (Hall in Morley, 2019: 79), while also embracing the opportunities and challenges of their new home by "orient[ing] toward the future" (Hall in Morley, 2019: 308). As mentioned earlier, the settlement duration in the new country of residence may affect immigrants' sentiment towards both local and global cultures (Smith, 2009). While a significant majority of the participants in my research hold a strong connection to their Malaysian roots, there is a notable minority, about 2%, who express a waning "affinity towards the country and the people". They attribute this shift to having lived "almost 40 odd years away from Malaysia", suggesting that such an extended period abroad naturally influences one's identity and perspectives (E09). The experience of residing in a foreign country for decades can profoundly impact an individual's sense of national identity, subtly eroding the visceral bond with their country of origin while unveiling a nuanced relationship with their birthplace. On one hand, this evolution in identity might denote time, memory, and cultural allegiance, where prolonged exposure to a different cultural environment gradually reshapes one's sense of self and community. On the other hand, this transformation could also signify a successful assimilation into the host society. Immigrants like E66, who feel "British now more than Malaysian", exemplify this phenomenon, where the amalgamation of daily experiences, interactions, and shared values with the new homeland fosters a revised identity. This transition

may not merely reflect a loss of connection with their Malaysian heritage but also an embrace of a new, hybrid identity, illustrating the fluid aspect of ethnocultural identity in the context of long-term migration.

Fashion

The participants' decision to adapt to the majority society through fashion reflects a conscious effort to blend into their new environment, viewing personal presentation as a key element of their integration process. Yet, this raises an important question: does adopting the local fashion trends signify assimilation rather than integration? While integration suggests preserving one's original cultural identity while participating in the broader society, assimilation might imply a deeper absorption where original cultural traits, such as dress codes, are replaced by those of the host culture. This distinction prompts a closer examination of whether the participants are merely adding new layers to their identity or fundamentally altering it to align with the majority society.

> E10: I started or tend to look at magazines to see how people dress to try and fit in the society. We all have to dress up like the English people here, buy this kind of jacket, or dress etc.
>
> E59: Just had to like adjust the fashion a bit.
>
> E52: I did change because I thought I looked good […] found the fashion I liked, and thought I look nicer dressing this way.
>
> S08: I wear Western clothes at work and that kind of stuff. So, I suppose most people would just assume that I'm maybe born in the UK.

Their narratives indicate that while individual motivations and attitudes toward fashion vary, a common underlying factor is the influence of perceived societal norms on their sartorial choices. These norms, often shaped by prevailing fashion trends in the United Kingdom, seem to exert a subtle yet palpable pressure on individuals like E10 and E59 to conform to the dominant style, underscoring a perceived need to "adjust" and "fit in". E10's engagement with fashion magazines for guidance underscores a proactive effort to assimilate into the local fashion scene. Conversely, E52's shift in fashion is driven by a personal aspiration to align her appearance with her own taste and preferences, suggesting a more self-directed integration of British fashion elements without losing a sense of personal identity. S08 presents a different

aspect of this dynamic; her choice to wear "Western clothes" leads colleagues to assume she might be native to the United Kingdom, revealing how fashion choices can inadvertently shape others' perceptions of one's cultural background. This assumption delineates the potential for fashion to communicate misleading signals about one's identity, reflecting broader societal stereotypes or misconceptions about what constitutes being British. These observations resonate with Goffman's insights in *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (1959), where he suggests that how individuals dress and conduct themselves serves as a form of social signalling, conveying messages about their status and identity. The participants' fashion choices, therefore, are not just about personal style or aesthetic preference; they are strategic responses to their social environment, aimed at navigating identity perception in a multicultural context. This interplay of personal identity, societal expectations, and the role of fashion in social integration or assimilation signify the complexity of adapting to a new cultural milieu while striving to maintain a sense of individuality.

Approximately 4% of the 93 participants who shared their fashion style in the United Kingdom have the influence that societal trends have had in shaping their fashion choices. Contrary to my expectations, no other participants spoke about their fashion choices in relation to the integration process, especially when there is a climate difference between Malaysia and the United Kingdom, which will inevitably have an impact on their clothing choices. Indeed, Malaysian fabric material (linen, cotton, organic cotton, silk, etc.) and cultural styles, such as *baju kurung, cheongsam*, *salwar kameez* and *saree* are not necessarily adapted to the climate in the United Kingdom. On the same note, I anticipated more participants, akin to UA09 who remarked, "I still wear my ethnic clothes," to discuss their inclination or practice of donning Eastern/ethnocultural attire in their current setting. The limited discourse on this subject might suggest that wearing "Western clothes" was already a prevalent practice among them, even back in Malaysia, diminishing the perceived importance of this topic in the context of their relocation. The motivations—whether to "fit in", "look good", or "adjust" to the prevailing norms—highlight an assimilationist tendency within their integration strategy. The manner in which individuals choose to present themselves in public, particularly through fashion, not only reflects personal identity but also indicates the need to navigate the sociocultural landscape of their new environment. In an article titled *I Am an Immigrant: Fashion, Immigration and Borders in the Contemporary Trans-global Landscape* (2019), Loscialpo focuses on the role of fashion in the identity construction of immigrants, particularly in the British context, and argues that fashion goes beyond superficiality and into significant understanding of the complexities

involved in identity construction. Loscialpo contends that fashion challenges “essentialist conceptions of cultural identity” in the British sociocultural arena, proposing that through the lens of “conviviality”— the coexistence in harmony—individuals can transcend traditional identity markers such as ethnicity or nationality, thereby blurring the lines between “citizen” and “alien” or “inside” and “outside” (Loscialpo, 2019: 28). This perspective resonates with the clothing choices of the participants, who navigate between Eastern/traditional and Western/contemporary attire, alluding to the fluidity of fashion as a reflection of broader sociocultural currents. These choices are not just personal preferences but are indicative of how they perceive themselves and how they are perceived within British society, and fashion’s profound role in the ongoing discourse between personal identity and societal integration.

By correlating both local and global cultures, Malaysian immigrants may have achieved a degree of blending through diverse cultural influences. They carry their culture and traditions with them, making gentle efforts to maintain aspects of their heritage as they assimilate into the new culture. This hybrid culture is a testament to their assimilation and integration strategies, which have helped them successfully navigate their way through different cultural landscapes. With their cultural heritage and exposure to new ways of living, Malaysian immigrants bring a valuable perspective to their new communities as a means to promote multiculturalism by embedding cultural diversity and differences (Parekh, 2000; Race, 2015). Their ability to embrace and blend different cultures is an asset that can contribute to the development of a more inclusive and diverse society by going “beyond mere toleration” (Parekh, 2000: 42). This is not to say that challenges are non-existent. Malaysian immigrants encounter cultural differences that are likely difficult to navigate, as they strive to find balance between their Malaysian cultural identity and experiences in the United Kingdom, with feelings of homesickness, discrimination , or disconnection potentially arising.

5.2.2. Challenges

The statistical analysis derived from the participants' narratives in Figure 18 reveals that the predominant challenge faced by Malaysians in the United Kingdom is discrimination, as reported by 50% of the participants. Additionally, homesickness emerges as a notable issue, affecting 25% of the individuals. Cultural differences pose a challenge for 12% of the participants, and 15% find the weather challenging.

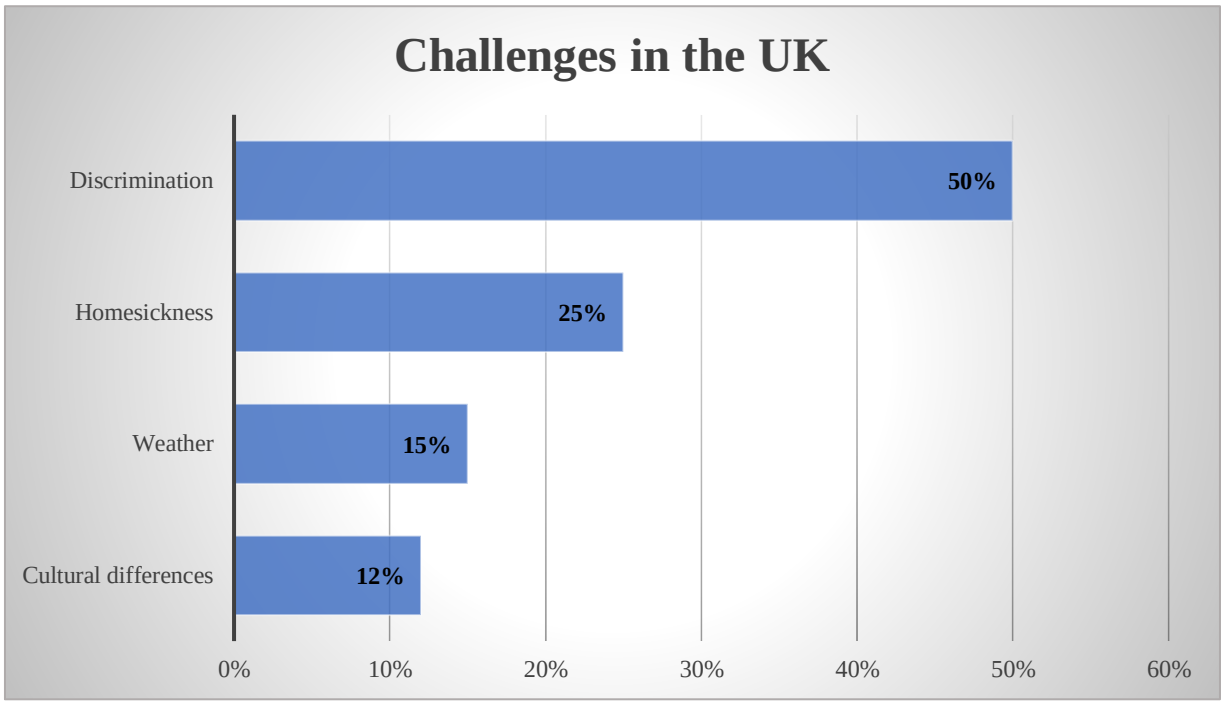

Figure 18: Challenges in the UK

The findings imply that discrimination is a significant issue for Malaysian immigrants in the United Kingdom, alongside homesickness and adapting to cultural differences. The weather is also cited as an obstacle, which is unsurprising given the stark contrast between the British and Malaysian climates. It is noteworthy that discrimination is a widespread issue, impacting individuals from various ethnocultural backgrounds. As discussed in section 4.4.3 Hirsch notes that the common narrative surrounding integration often fails to recognise that most immigrants arriving in the United Kingdom do not harbour intentions to live in isolation or evade assimilation. Instead, their primary motive is to forge "a better life" than what they left behind, seeking neither "segregation" nor the "*desire* to be treated differently"; their core aspiration is "to be treated the same" (Hirsch, 2018: 293). Unfortunately, issues of discrimination, ethnic profiling and stereotyping confronted in the migratory experiences are a reality for some Malaysians in the United Kingdom. There is bias or prejudice encountered from others, particularly when they are perceived to belong to a minority group based on their physical

appearance or if they have a distinct accent that differs from the majority population— "always seen as a foreigner" (E58). Figure 19 illustrates the number of racial hate crime incidents that were recorded in the United Kingdom from 2011 to 2022, published by Statista Research Department in 2022. More than 100,000 incidents were reported in 2021/22, compared with approximately 90,000 incidents from the previous year. In the aftermath of George Floyd's tragic death and the significant impact of the Black Lives Matter movement paired with the propagation of the Coronavirus pandemic in 2020, the quest for racial justice has reached a turning point. The discussions have expanded beyond addressing methods to prevent racist incidents to include exploring how racism stems from stereotypes, prejudice, ignorance and lack of knowledge.

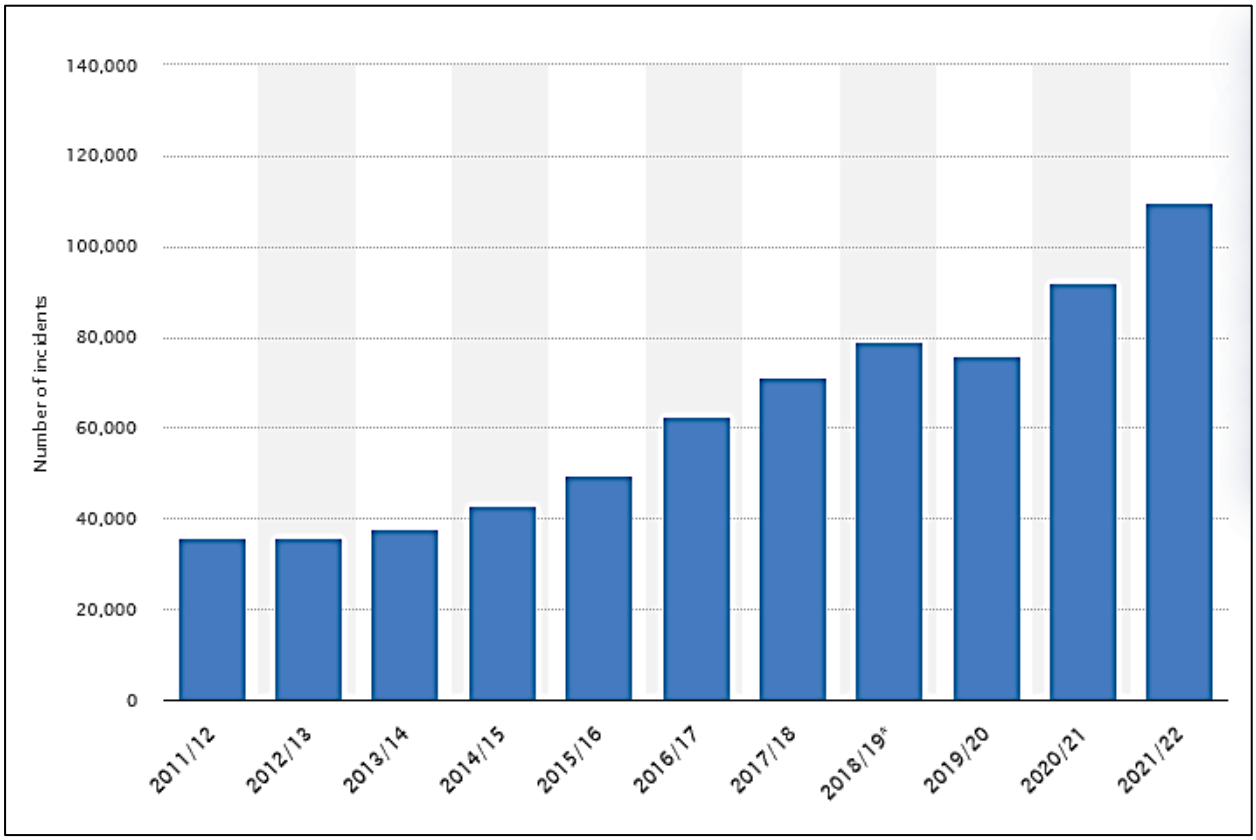

Figure 19: Number of racial hate crimes in the UK, 2011-2022. Source credit: Statista Research Department

Discrimination

Malaysian immigrants encounter discrimination or prejudice in navigating their ethnocultural identity in British society as they may be perceived and treated differently based on their ethnicity, leading them to navigate the complex multicultural dynamics in the United

Kingdom. From a socioeconomic perspective, Malaysian immigrants in the United Kingdom are predominantly skilled professionals, students, and business people. As previously established, many of them are highly skilled and possess advanced degrees, which should mean that they have better employment opportunities and salaries. However, some Malaysians face employment discrimination due to their ethnicity or religious beliefs, which could limit their employment suitability and progression.

> E06: I find that being an immigrant is a bit difficult to find a proper job according to my education and my experience.
>
> E31: My name is very much English and Spanish. So, when I go for interviews, they expect a white woman to walk in. And then you can see their face drop because a coloured person walks in. I immediately had a feeling when I walked into an office for an interview that I wasn't going to get the job. They say things like I'm overqualified… when I was only 21 years old. I could say it was racism.
>
> E20: I've experienced very subtle discrimination at work. There was restructuring at the hospital, and somebody else, who is not even a specialist in that service, applied for my job. They combined a general physio manager role with my role, and created one post. It took them three days to decide, and I didn't get the job, the other person did.

These excerpts mention issues they face in relation to discrimination and bias in the employment market. E06's immigrant status has made it difficult to find employment that matches her education and experience, which could be linked to language barriers, qualifications or work experience, or biases on the part of the employers. E31 suspected that her name had led to ethnic discrimination during employment applications due to preconceived notions about appearance or origin based on her name, leading to prejudiced treatment during the recruitment process. E31's suspicion highlights the difficulty in identifying and addressing discrimination particularly when it is subtle, and "there's no way to find out", pinpointed by I01 who had similar experiences. E20 described her experience in the form of not being offered the position despite being more qualified than the other candidate, suggesting what Eddo-Lodge calls "structural racism" where the "collective effects of bias" on the part of the hiring team, or a lack of diversity and inclusion in the workplace culture are manifested (2018: 65).

The discriminatory implications based on a person's appearance, ethnicity and religion is equally captured in the clothing choice.

> E01: I was wearing a hijab, and people were not used to that yet. I was quite frustrated because I sent my CV, and spoke to them on the phone. They said to come in for an interview. But when they saw me with a *hijab*, they said sorry straightaway, and told me I was not suitable for the job.

The issue of religious discrimination in the employment market is stressed here. E01's frustration founded upon not being offered the position based on the *hijab*, typically worn by many Muslim women, is understandable, particularly after having gone through the application and preparation for the interview, only to be turned away presumably based on her appearance and assumable religion. This incident could suggest that the employer was unfamiliar with or lacked religious and cultural competency or even tolerance. Muslim discrimination became a highly scrutinised issue following the city riots in 2001 and gained even more attention following the acts of terrorism on 9/11 and 7/7 (Garbaye & Latour, 2016). As discussed in section 2.3.7, the experiences of identity, discrimination, and integration among Muslim communities in post-9/11 and 7/7 Britain are crucial for understanding the factors that influence their daily lives, sense of belonging, and engagement in society, particularly against the backdrop of increasing Islamophobia and Eurocentrism (Niaz & Nasir, 2018). These experiences affect not just their societal integration but also their employment opportunities, with Niaz and Nasir highlighting the occurrences among both the Pakistani and the wider Muslim communities in the United Kingdom. Thus, these incidents have increased the vulnerability and hostility toward Muslim communities, particularly those who wear visible religious attire like the hijab when seeking employment, as exemplified by E01. Her narrative implies that such discrimination is not limited to a single isolated incident but is part of a larger issue that deserves attention and action to promote fair and equal opportunities for all in the employment market.

Being an immigrant in the United Kingdom, a nation "still profoundly uncomfortable with race and difference" (Eddo-Lodge, 2018: preface), seems to create barriers in terms of employment progression and promotions. The participants have expressed the belief that opportunities for promotion may be biased in "favour more to the UK person" as explained by E26 who also had been declined a promotion. These biases reflect a need for cultural awareness and equal opportunities, calling for policies that promote more diversity and inclusion in the

workplace (Parekh, 2000). Throughout centuries, ethnic discrimination has consistently relied on the utilisation of physical, biological, and cultural features, in other words, based on "visual differences" (Hirsch, 2018: 24), to discriminate against and marginalise certain groups of people (Parekh, 2000). Many participants have described their experience of discrimination as "subtle", "insidious", "indirect", but also "direct" and "overt" in various places and situations: "sometimes in jobs, sometimes day to day. This aligns with Parekh's assertion that racism in Britain is "subtle and hidden" (2000: 59). Intriguingly, S08 reported facing racism from both Asian and white individuals, highlighting instances where she was subtly insulted by other Asians due to her "clearly white" husband, a sentiment echoed by UA09 and further illustrated by experiences of name-calling while walking with her "white husband". This adds layers to the understanding of racism, indicating that it can manifest within and across different ethnic groups, challenging the conventional narratives of racial discrimination.

Approximately 30% of the participants shared experiences of verbal harassment in the streets of the United Kingdom. The findings demonstrated that Malaysians with Indian ethnic background were often stereotyped and called "Paki" or told "do you like curries?" due to the "brown skin colour" (E10) appearance. These incidents occurred while walking down the street or in the park, and often by "a group of young teenagers" (E20) or "ignorant kids" (E18) who appear to hail from "underprivileged background" (E31). Perry's analysis might prove useful here.

> Thus, these dietary and culinary differences are used as identity markers, especially in racial insults and slurs as seen in the story. As children, other than skin colour, food is the easiest and most obvious element of ethnic classification. Globally, there are many other examples of how culture and peoples are mostly derogatively labelled through their ethnic food and dishes. Common examples of ethnic slurs and labels that use food, also known as food slurs would include the terms "curry" to refer to people of South Asian origin, "beaner" to refer to Mexicans or people of Central American descent, "cabbage-eater" for Germans or Russians and "kimchi" for Koreans. (2017: 193)

These food slurs act as reductive markers of ethnic identity, simplifying and diminishing an individual's cultural heritage to mere dietary habits. By using food-related terms as derogatory labels, there is an oversimplification and stereotyping that fails to acknowledge the depth and

diversity of a person's background. Such slurs not only trivialise complex traditions, languages, and histories that constitute an individual's heritage but also perpetuate harmful stereotypes that can influence public perception and individual self-identity. Moreover, the casual use of these slurs in public discourse denotes a broader issue of cultural insensitivity and ignorance, reinforcing divisive notions based on superficial and often inaccurate understandings of cultural differences. Correspondingly, Malaysians with a Chinese ethnic background were often subjected to being called "chink", "yellow" or being told to "go back to China" (see 4.4.1). What is more, with the Coronavirus pandemic spreading in the year 2020, it triggered a kind of ethnic discrimination towards those with a Chinese ethnic background and associated them with Coronavirus. A 2021 study conducted by Gray and Hansen to examine whether Covid-19 had a negative impact and increased hate crimes toward the Chinese ethnic community in London, revealed that "the pandemic has had an enduring effect on hate crimes against Chinese people" and that they continued to increase "through to the end of August 2020" (2021: 583). Verbal harassment such as "Coronavirus" and "go away Corona" were cited as examples given particularly by the participants. Malaysians with a Malay ethnic background were not spared and were sometimes called "terrorist" as articulated by S03 who went on further to state that the individual had "popped [her] son's balloon with a cigarette". While most participants just "walked away" (E50) from such situations, others responded back in retaliation and defence, going to the extent of reporting some cases to the relevant authorities. According to Parekh, street racism and institutional racism are interconnected, and these must be addressed through a reassessment of what it means to be British. In sharing their lived stories, they have provided insights into the different ways people respond to verbal harassment incidents, suggesting their numerous coping mechanisms depending on the situation and personal preferences. In E27's case, she affirmed that "if you don't speak with their accent, then you're an outsider… so I'm an outsider". This suggests a shift in perception: "les *outsiders* ne sont plus ceux qui ne font pas partie de « notre » communauté ethnique, mais ceux qui ne partagent pas nos « valeurs »" (Lassalle, 2009: 123). This excerpt aligns with Huntington (2004), in that when a person is considered an outsider upon joining a new social group, in most cases they tend to perceive themselves as an outsider too. If a minority group is labelled as outsiders, it is likely that they will internalise this perception and begin to identify themselves as such. This analysis (see 2.2.3) resonates with Hall's "suturing of a subject to a subject-position" through Althusser's process of "interpellation" in reference to ethnic identity, which offers a critical framework for deciphering such phenomena.

While 30% of participants have been subjected to verbal harassment, 10% have attested to ethnic profiling and stereotyping.

> E10: I got a few occasions where I was being followed by those who work there. I was carrying a bag and they followed me. And I had to go to the counter and prove to them that I'm not a shoplifter. I became defensive because of a lot of attacks like that.
>
> E64: I was actually being racially profiled. I went down to a local supermarket to get some ice and I realised that I was followed by two people around all of the aisles. And I turned around and asked why they were following me. They said that they didn't recognise me, and I looked a little different. I just looked all around me and saw that every single person was white. So, I think that that is a classic racial profiling and being racist without actually saying that they're racist.
>
> S03: I think the longer you stay and recognise the culture, the more you recognise whether it is racism or not as some can be subtle.

The three excerpts illuminate varied experiences of discrimination in retail settings and how negative retail experiences are often predicated on physical appearance. The underlying assumption that these individuals were perceived as potential threats necessitated them demonstrating that they were not "shoplifters", solely based on their distinct appearance. This indicates a scenario where racial prejudices are at play, subtly manifesting in everyday interactions and reinforcing the notion that individuals who "look different" are subjected to heightened scrutiny and suspicion, thus highlighting an underlying layer of racism in such mundane contexts. These experiences emphasise the issue of ethnic profiling and its impact on individuals, who feel a sense of exclusion, shielding from discrimination based on their ethnicity in an ideological system where "generations of people were conditioned to believe in the inferiority of non-white, non-Christian, non-Europeans" (Hirsch, 2018: 24-25). According to S03, some forms of racism are implicit, making them harder to identify. Huntington (2004) argues that in order to form a sense of identity, individuals or groups need to differentiate themselves from others through comparison. This often leads to an increase in the perception of differences between groups, which can result in antagonism and the development of stereotypes towards others, as Eder *et al.* postulate:

> Individual actors are in permanent interaction while negotiating and figuring out what they share with each other and what creates differences […]. Preferences and interests are formed in the process of interacting with others. (in Holst, 2012: 23)

In other words, when individuals or groups define themselves in terms of who they are not, rather than who they are, this can lead to a sense of "us and them" and exacerbate conflicts, "where the differences between us and them are imagined to be racial, rooted in unalterable nature" (Parekh, 2000: 18).

This process of differentiation through comparison can be especially problematic when it leads to group differences and the reinforcement of rigid boundaries between groups, much like the term BAME (Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic) employed by the British government to refer to the collective ethnic minority population (Gov.UK). The term BAME has been disaggregated in March 2021 by the Commission on Race and Ethnic Disparities, recommending that the government cease the usage (Gov.UK). For this label can unconsciously lead to the oversimplification and homogenisation of diverse ethnic and cultural identities by grouping them together under a singular entity, perpetuating the notion of a monolithic "otherness" and overlooking the unique histories, struggles, and aspirations of each distinct group (Ullah in Motard, 2013; Eddo-Lodge, 2018). On the one hand, many participants have shared their experiences of othering through the types of discrimination encountered in various settings in the United Kingdom. On the other hand, there are those who testified to having "experienced more racism in Malaysia than in the UK" (E48), and who account for approximately 40% (50% face discrimination in the UK, while 10% omitted this information), emphasising the contrasting experiences of discrimination that are not homogeneous between participants in the United Kingdom.

> E64: I got called up a *pendatang* (immigrant in Malay) back in Malaysia. And I actually found it really upsetting because I was born in Malaysia. I'm third generation born Malaysian. And then, to actually go back to Malaysia for a holiday, and be called the same thing again, was really upsetting. If I'm not welcome in Malaysia, and I'm not really welcome where I've made my home now, then where the hell am I supposed to go?

> E32: I experienced more discrimination in Malaysia than I did in England, which makes me very sad. Over here, everything I do is based on merit,

judged on what I produce, and not on the colour of my skin, or who my father is. So, I find it very freeing and liberating here.

E05: It's very overt in Malaysia.

Despite being born in Malaysia and being a third-generation Malaysian, E64 expressed his frustration of being called a *pendatang*, highlighting the same derogatory treatment he faces during visits to Malaysia. E64's experiences have left him questioning his sense of belonging where he feels a lack of acceptance in both Malaysia and the United Kingdom. E32 expressed her appreciation for the merit-based system in England, where her achievements and abilities are valued regardless of her skin colour or family background. She alluded to feeling more accepted and included in England compared to Malaysia, indicating a greater sense of freedom and fairness in England. E05's statement aligns with the experiences shared by E64 and E32 suggesting that discrimination in Malaysia is explicit and direct. These accounts shed light on the challenges faced by these participants who feel marginalised despite being Malaysian nationals. Ethnic discrimination and xenophobia have deeply affected various aspects of Malaysian society, including politics, business, employment, education, and community life (Malaysia racism report, 2022). Despite being recognised for its diversity, Malaysia is marred by ethnocentrically biased policies, perpetuating ethnic discrimination and limiting access to equal opportunities (Malaysia racism report, 2022). No pluralistic society is exempt from social and political differences along communal lines.

The findings of this research further underscore these dynamics. Unexpectedly, only 50% of participants reported experiencing discrimination in both Malaysia and the United Kingdom—a figure that may reflect the need for more targeted questioning. For instance, explicitly addressing racism in Malaysia, where it is open and institutionalised, might have elicited a higher response rate. In contrast, discrimination in the United Kingdom may be perceived as less overt. Participants' reluctance to openly discuss racism may also stem from cultural norms and legal restrictions in Malaysia that discourage addressing such issues publicly. Notably, participants frequently reported being misidentified as Chinese, Indian, or other Asian ethnicities, highlighting their desire to be recognised specifically as Malaysians. This misidentification reflects broader issues of identity and belonging. The significance of participants experiencing more discrimination in Malaysia than in the UK emphasises the urgent need to address all forms of discrimination globally, fostering a more inclusive and equitable society.

Homesickness

Being away from one's birth country and loved ones can be emotionally difficult, often leading to feelings of isolation and loneliness. Zygmunt Bauman in *From Pilgrim to Tourist - or a Short History of Identity* provides his definition of homesickness.

> Homesickness means a dream of *belonging;* to be, for once, *of the* place, not merely *in.* (in Hall & du Gay, 1996: 30)

A deep emotional longing for a sense of belonging is conveyed, suggesting that homesickness is not just about missing a particular location but yearning for a profound connection with that place. It differentiates between being physically present "*in*" a place and feeling an integral part of it, "*of*" the place. This interpretation points to the emotional depth of homesickness and a desire to fully integrate and identify with a place, feeling completely at home and connected, rather than feeling like an outsider or a temporary denizen. The connection between the emotional interpretation of homesickness and the importance of family and community support for Malaysian immigrants in the United Kingdom is profound. The deep emotional longing and yearning for a sense of belonging, as expressed in the interpretation of homesickness, highlight the fundamental human need to feel connected and integral to a place. This emotional depth is not just about missing one's native land; it is about seeking a profound sense of identity and attachment to the surrounding environment. For Malaysian immigrants, this sense of belonging is nurtured through the support of family and community networks. These networks serve as a critical lifeline that provides emotional support, cultural connection, and a semblance of home in a foreign land. They help individuals to not just live in a place but to feel a part of it, mitigating feelings of being an outsider or a temporary visitor. Through these support systems, immigrants can experience a sense of continuity and connection with their cultural identity, which is crucial for their emotional well-being and integration into British society. 25% of the participants have avowed to feeling homesick, particularly at the beginning of their migration.

> E63: My entire family was in Malaysia, so it was more of a struggle of finding out how to do things. I felt really homesick because… first job far away, moving alone and being away from family.

E63 describes the emotional struggles and challenges associated with moving to a new country and being away from family and familiar surroundings. The homesickness that is felt suggests the experience of isolation and loneliness which is common for individuals who move to new

countries or unfamiliar environments. Much like E63, several participants have pointed out being “lonely”, “isolated” and “homesick” as a result of separation from a “closely knitted family” (S07, E38 and E34). Likewise, they have associated being homesick with missing “parents”, “Malaysian food”, “social life back in Malaysia”, “friends” and “hot weather”. E38 explained that one of the ways in which these participants address these feelings is by “cooking Malaysian food at home” and “look for Malaysians to be friends with”, possibly providing a sense of familiarity and understanding of their cultural background, which can help alleviate feelings of isolation and disconnection. E38’s reflection that “being overseas has made [her] more Malaysian than when [she] was in Malaysia” intriguingly indicates that immersion in a foreign culture can amplify one’s consciousness of their own national identity and reinforce their connection to their home culture. This suggests that the contrasts and challenges faced while living abroad can lead individuals to more deeply value and cling to their cultural roots, thereby intensifying their sense of national identity, where distance from one’s homeland can foster a stronger affiliation and appreciation for one’s own culture, prompting individuals to embrace and celebrate their heritage with greater fervour. The necessity for support systems and resources is understood as a need for tools to help individuals adapt to new environments and cope with the emotional challenges that may arise from migration (Storti, 2001). When family and community support are established, these individuals may feel less homesick, as is the case for E01 who has “family and friends now” so she is “no longer homesick”, underscoring the significance of social support in mitigating the effects of homesickness for those settled abroad.

For first-generation immigrants, particularly those from minority groups with distinct racial, cultural, and skin colour differences from the majority, the experience of homesickness is pronounced and multifaceted. This demographic tends to experience higher levels of discomfort, partly due to the stark contrast between their heritage and the new environment. Such homesickness is not merely a longing for the familiar but also a reaction to the stress and alienation they might feel in a foreign setting. In *Diasporas as social movements?,* Sharon M. Quinsaat points out:

> Affective bonds, couched in the language of loyalty to the nation, are particularly crucial, not just in homeland-oriented migrant mobilization, but also in day-to-day coping with disenchantment, homesickness and marginalization in the host society, and regret at leaving the homeland. The motherland becomes an ‘identity reservoir’, a reference to one’s earlier life

> and as ‘a source for nostalgia and as an implicit standard according to which one makes sense of values, habits, and life experiences in the context of immigration’ (Boccagni 2010: 188). (in Cohen & Fischer, 2019: 50)

Immigrants draw upon their homeland as an “‘identity reservoir’”, using it as a benchmark to navigate their values and experiences in the host country. Immigrants’ active participation in transnational activities emphasises their enduring connection to their homeland, significantly influencing their daily adaptation and sense of belonging in a new society. This engagement with their cultural roots—through language, customs, and social practices—serves as a coping mechanism to mitigate stress and maintain a sense of identity. Thus, homesickness, particularly prevalent among new and first-generation immigrants, is a key factor that maintains and reinforces their strong ties to their original cultural and social milieus, aiding their adaptation while preserving their distinct identity.

Cultural differences.

As highlighted earlier, the cultural and lifestyle differences between the United Kingdom and Malaysia are pronounced. Consequently, Malaysian immigrants might face challenges in adjusting to the social etiquette, interaction styles, and cultural norms. A notable 12% of the participants in the study reported experiencing culture shock during their transition, indicating the impact of these differences on their acclimation process.

> E21: At the beginning, it was extremely hard… a bit of culture shock. It was a really lonely first year. I didn’t really know how to interact with a lot of the usual things. There’s kind of unspoken politeness that you need to learn. So, took a long time to pick that up and practice in real life.

> UA06: Cultural and belief differences which limits some of the social mixing.

These statements illuminate the challenges encountered while assimilating into a new cultural setting. E21 expressed being taken aback and uncertain about navigating the new cultural landscape, specifically mentioning the effort required to grasp the “unspoken” rules of “politeness”. UA06 highlighted that “cultural and belief differences” could impede social interactions, leading to a sense of isolation and adjustment difficulties. Similarly, others pointed out struggles with “a cultural barrier”, particularly with “pub culture”. E21 and E70, coming from “a different culture” and not partaking in alcohol, found it challenging to “mingle” or

"connect" with "white British people", illustrating the complexities of cultural integration. The possible obstacles to social integration may stem from having different cultural backgrounds or lifestyle choices than the majority culture. Although the use of "white British people" here applies neither to all British people nor implies that they are unwelcoming or hostile towards those from different cultures or who do not drink alcohol. Instead, it alludes to the social standards of the majority culture which are unlikely to align with the experiences and values of those from other cultural backgrounds or lifestyle choices. Subsequently, there may be a sense of discomfort or the inability to fully participate in social settings.

In contrast, E38 feels "more familiar and easier" with British culture than "the Middle East", stating the "cultural barriers or culture shock" is more enunciated. While E21 and E70 faced challenges in relation to connecting with the locals because of cultural and lifestyle differences, E38 seems to have experienced less of a cultural block in the United Kingdom. This sense of familiarity and comfort suggests a more nuanced landscape of cultural adjustment, where personal backgrounds, experiences, and individual predispositions play a critical role. Several factors might contribute to E38's smoother integration into British society. Firstly, prior exposure to British culture, possibly through media, education, or previous visits, could have provided E38 with a preliminary understanding and appreciation of British customs and social norms, reducing the intensity of culture shock upon arrival. Secondly, language proficiency is a vital facilitator of cultural integration. Fluency in English would enable E38 to communicate effectively, understand cultural nuances, and engage more deeply with the local community, easing the process of adaptation. Additionally, personal preferences and lifestyle choices significantly influence how one perceives and adapts to a new culture. E38's individual preferences might align more closely with British cultural practices than those of the Middle East, facilitating a sense of belonging and ease in the United Kingdom. It is also possible that E38's personality traits, such as openness to new experiences and adaptability, could contribute to a more positive perception of and adjustment to British culture. This juxtaposition of these experiences highlights the subjective nature of cultural integration, illustrating that while some may face considerable hurdles in adapting to new cultural environments, others may find certain cultures more compatible with their own backgrounds and dispositions.

Not only does experiencing cultural differences occur in the new country of residence, it can also occur for individuals upon returning to their birth country, which is the case for 20% of the participants. When some of them return home for a holiday to visit family and friends, they have expressed "a kind of culture shock" (E32) and the need to assimilate back into their

birth country. This is attributable to the fact that they have spent a significant amount of time abroad, have assimilated and integrated to such an extent that they have developed a sense of belonging in the United Kingdom. Home is traditionally where one is born and raised, closely tied to childhood memories and a sense of belonging. However, this concept can lose its allure when the physical space or familiar connections no longer exist — the house may be sold, family may have moved away, or time may have altered the landscape of "home". When 'home' no longer exists in its original form, there is no longer a place to return to, diminishing the longing for 'home'. This shift in perception can also be experienced when returning to a place that once felt like home, highlighting the impact of physical and emotional changes on one's sense of belonging. In turn, returning to Malaysia may surface feelings of unfamiliarity to such an extent that they undergo a readaptation period. This phenomenon is commonly referred to as "reverse culture shock", explored by Storti in *The Art of Coming Home* (2001) and John and Jeanne Gullahorn in *The Expatriate Comes Home* (1963), a term that describes the psychological and emotional challenges that individuals face when returning to their birth country after spending an extended period of time abroad. This calls to mind Bhabha's "homeliness" which was built on Hall's notion of "home" that cannot be reclaimed or restored exactly as it was initially lived or imagined (see 3.2.3). The notion of "home" is not static but constantly influenced by historical, political, and cultural factors, bringing about transformations, ruptures, and dislocations that disrupt any fixed notion of "home". In sum, the experience of cultural differences is a complex and fragmented process occurring both in one's country of settlement and upon returning to the birth country, where the possibility of a "Third Space" may enter into the process of belonging.

Weather

Climate is another factor that challenges immigrants and their settlement into the new country of residence. The United Kingdom is known for its unpredictable weather, as well as its significantly colder and wetter climate compared to Malaysia. The need to invest in warm clothing and adapt to the seasonal changes is an important part of Malaysian immigrants' life in the United Kingdom. 15% of the participants have admitted to "struggling with the cold weather", disliking "the cold weather" and not knowing "how to layer" themselves or where to "buy winter clothing" at the start of their migration (S06, E19 and E15). Contrarily, some participants have "grown to like the weather" where they live now (S01). These findings suggest that the unpredictable weather and colder climate in the United Kingdom can be particularly challenging for Malaysian immigrants who are used to a warmer and more

consistent climate in their birth country (explored in 5.2.1). Consequently, the necessity of investing in appropriate warm clothing to cope with the colder climate signifies a practical aspect of their adaptation process. Over time, the acclimatisation to colder weather, with some participants even growing to appreciate it, underscores the human capacity for adaptability and resilience in new environmental conditions. However, the fact that about 45% of the participants are considering retirement in Malaysia, primarily to avoid the host country's winter months, illuminates a significant aspect of long-term living preferences influenced by climate. This inclination to return to a warmer climate for retirement suggests a deep-rooted connection to their homeland's environment, which continues to play a crucial role in their future life planning. This situation underlines the broader implications of climate on migration and integration experiences. The subjective nature of climate-related issues combined with nearly half of the participants planning to retire in a warmer climate highlights the potential impact of climate change on migration patterns and the need for long-term planning and adaptation strategies.

In sum, Malaysian immigrants who have settled in the United Kingdom face numerous challenges, the most common being discrimination, homesickness, cultural differences, and weather. These challenges can create obstacles in their integration process and hinder their efforts to establish a home in the United Kingdom, possibly impacting their quality of life and sense of belonging in what Hall calls a "social chasm" (2017: 56). This, in turn, prompts debates around the United Kingdom's policies and the growing demand for embracing a broader range of culturally diverse values rather than solely focusing on ideas of assimilation and integration (Race, 2015). Despite these challenges, many Malaysian immigrants have found ways to overcome them and thrive successfully in integrating into British society, signifying that individuals from different backgrounds often share a collective perspective on what defines success, the essential qualities required to achieve it, and the methods used to assess success (Commission for Racial Equality, 2005). These reflections have led to the need to include "all the elements of diversity" (Misrahi-Barak in Motard, 2013: 22) for complete integration, inclusion and a sense of community cohesion. The inquiry into how deeply these Malaysian immigrants feel connected to "Britain as an imagined community" (Parekh, 2000: 15; Anderson, 1983) is pivotal and will be explored in the subsequent section. This question delves into the conceptual realm of national identity and belonging, examining whether these individuals perceive themselves as integral members of the British societal fabric or if they view their relationship with the United Kingdom as more transient or superficial.

5.2.3. Sense of belonging

A sense of belonging to a community is an essential aspect of life, a "fundamental human need" (Hirsch, 2018: 22). Probyn defines belonging as "the ways in which individuals and groups are caught within wanting to belong, wanting to become" (1996: 19). It offers what individuals seek: a sense of security, trust, confidence, and acceptance (Bauman, 2008). Individuals establish a feeling of belonging to a specific community when they share commonalities such as ethnicity, religion, language, culture, or similar interests (Parekh, 2000; Yuval-Davis, 2006; Hirsch, 2018). Belonging to a community can be influenced by these factors "in an unconscious process of social conditioning" (Hirsch, 2018: 22), which may also set individuals apart from others. The different aspects of political, cultural, economic, and social life, along with factors like globalisation and migration, have a growing influence on the individual's sense of identity and belonging (Appadurai, 1990). Consequently, individuals often find themselves unsure about where they truly belong. Additionally, a sense of alienation or disconnection from both their home society and host society may arise.

In the same way, Malaysian immigrants may experience a sense of alienation or disconnection from both their birth country and the United Kingdom. Feelings of unbelonging can lead to isolation, loneliness, or marginalisation, particularly if they encounter

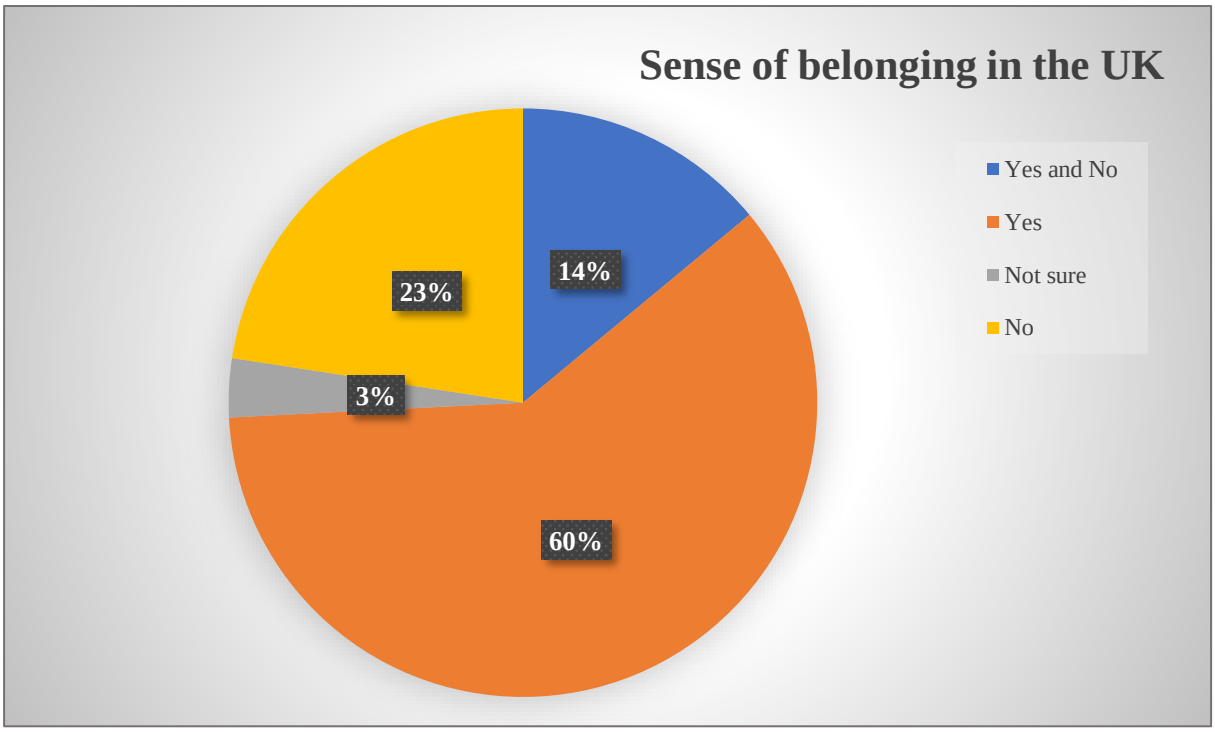

Figure 20: Sense of belonging in the UK

discrimination or feel excluded due to their ethnicity or nationality. From Figure 20, the data

illustrates that a significant majority (60%) of the participants affirm a strong sense of belonging to the United Kingdom, indicating their successful integration. In contrast, 23% of the participants report a lack of such belonging, while 14% express ambivalence, and a marginal 3% remain uncertain about their feelings of affiliation. The statistics identify key factors influencing the sense of belonging among these individuals. Geographical location emerges as the predominant factor, with a notable majority attributing their sense of belonging to their specific location within the United Kingdom. Following geographical location, the distribution of diverse populations, the presence of social and family networks, and socioeconomic status also appear as significant contributors to the sense of belonging. These findings suggest that the sense of belonging is a varied construct, influenced by a range of individual and contextual factors, and highlights the importance of considering these various dimensions in understanding the integration experiences of Malaysian immigrants in the United Kingdom.

> E35: Yes. I live in [East of England], which is a highly cosmopolitan city. My job opportunities tend to be in the cities that have done well in the past two decades, which means a large middle-class population, and a strong presence of foreigners - elements that tend to increase acceptance for foreign middle-class professionals such as myself. This, of course, does not preclude the same acceptance in less wealthy areas, just that I identify and get along far easier with the comfortable professional middle-class types.

> E30: Yes. Where I live and work, there isn't a large Chinese population. I don't particularly feel like an outsider. I have few Chinese friends in the area, but keep in touch with people I went to university with through Facebook/WhatsApp.

> E40: Yes, most definitely. London is unique with having so many different nationalities all mixed together, making friendships turn into our own blend of families.

> E32: London is my city and I feel more Londoner than British.

The examination of their sense of belonging in the United Kingdom provides a nuanced understanding of how experiences and perceptions are shaped by their environment. Participant E35's narrative points to the significance of residing in a cosmopolitan city, which she

associates with greater acceptance among foreign and established middle-class professionals. This preference indicates socioeconomic status and a sense of community, where identification with professional middle-class individuals transcends geographic or ethnocultural determinants of belonging. In contrast, E30's experience illustrates that a strong sense of belonging can develop irrespective of a large co-ethnic community, suggesting that other factors, such as personal connections or individual adaptability, may play a crucial role. E40's emphasises London's multiculturalism as a major factor fostering a sense of belonging through diverse social interactions and networks. This is further echoed by E32, who distinguishes her identity as a "Londoner" over being British, pointing to a localised, city-specific sense of identity and belonging, influenced by London's "super-diversity". These narratives collectively suggest that the sense of belonging and acceptance among Malaysian immigrants in the United Kingdom is multilayered, influenced by factors such as geographical location, diversity, social networks, and personal identification with specific urban identities. The reference to the United Kingdom as "a community of citizens and a community of communities" (Parekh, 2000) highlighting the importance of inclusive, diverse environments in fostering a sense of belonging. The concept of "super-diversity" (Vertovec, 2007) in cities like London aligns with participants' experiences, suggesting that such environments offer a shared sense of identity and belonging among co-citizens in similar circumstances. Moreover, the prevalence of big city residency among participants and their reported sense of belonging foregrounds the role of urban settings in facilitating integration and community connection. This observation aligns with broader discussions on urbanisation and migration, indicating that cities are key locales for migrant integration and identity formation. These findings highlight the complexity of belonging and acceptance, which are contingent on a constellation of factors, including but not limited to, geographical location, social networks, and the sociocultural landscape of the host country.

The 14% of participants who have testified to feeling ambiguous about whether they belong in their current location, come from different parts of the United Kingdom, indicating that differences exist between urban and suburban areas (Prabhat, 2018). These participants' responses suggest that the feeling of ambiguity about belonging is not restricted to any specific region or location within the United Kingdom and may be influenced by a variety of factors.

> S07: I live in [city in Scotland] now and it is amazing, but I wouldn't say I belong 100%. I still feel like a racial and religious minority, that my family is far away, and that I'm separated from my culture and traditions.

The narrative provided by participant S07 offers a nuanced perspective on the experience of living in a major Scottish city, where non-EU nationals constitute 5% of the population (ONS, 2022). Despite acknowledging the city's appealing attributes, S07 articulates a profound sense of detachment from her cultural and traditional roots. This sentiment is attributed to her identification with a "racial and religious minority" group. Such an affiliation appears to underpin her feelings of incomplete belonging, suggesting that despite the city's ostensibly inclusive environment, minority status can significantly influence one's sense of cultural and communal affiliation. This instance underlines the complexity of belonging, illustrating how it extends beyond mere physical or geographical placement to encompass deeper layers of identity, including race and religion. S07's experience brings out a critical aspect of the immigrant experience—that the sense of belonging is not solely contingent on the diversity or size of the city but is also profoundly affected by the individual's perception of their minority status and the extent to which they can connect with their cultural heritage within their new environment. Furthermore, what is understood is that the complexities of identity and belonging are induced by elements such as ethnocultural background and religious beliefs. Even when living in a welcoming and inclusive environment, it may still be insufficient to overcome feelings of detachment and marginalisation that stem from being a minority in a particular community. Feelings of detachment from one's current location is in a way linked to feelings of attachment and loyalty to the birth country (Ratnam, 2019). Many participants have avowed experiencing the binary feelings of detachment/attachment, of belonging to *two homes or two spaces* as I define it, which is captured in the sentiment: "I'm going home to see family in Malaysia, but at the end of that, I'm coming back home to the UK as well" (E28).

A sense of duality in identity and belonging is observed among some participants who have settled in the United Kingdom, but also identify Malaysia as their home. There is security in knowing that they can "always return home to Malaysia if anything happens" (I01). In this context, the notion of "unhomeliness" as delineated by Bhabha emerges as a pivotal construct, representing a state of being that transcends traditional territorial and cultural boundaries. This "unhomeliness" is articulated as an "extra-territorial and cross-cultural initiation", a liminal space where the demarcation between home and the globe is blurred (1994: 9). This blurring of boundaries ushers in the genesis of an entirely new realm, referred to as the "Third Space", *own space* or *hybrid space* (my quote, see 3.3.4). It is a domain where identity is continuously negotiated and redefined, reflecting the inherent ambivalence and fluidity of cultural intersections. The notion of individuals having multiple places that they call "home" can render

their sense of belonging complex and ambivalent, particularly when "Malaysia is still in the heart" (UA06). It can be elaborated that the concept of 'home' holds a polygonal significance for mobile Malaysians, as Ratnam (2019) illuminates. This attachment to 'home' is not static but rather varies in intensity, intricately linked to the individual's age at the time of emigration from Malaysia. The adaptation process in the host country is greatly impacted by the age at which individuals emigrate. The younger the individual at the point of departure, the more nuanced their connection to the homeland might be, potentially influencing their identity and sense of belonging in complex ways. From my observation, it appears that the earlier individuals depart from their 'nest'—their homeland—and the longer they reside abroad, the more their emotional and cultural attachments evolve. Specifically, an inverse relationship emerges: the younger they are at the time of departure and the more extended their stay in the host country, the weaker their attachment to their country of origin becomes. Concurrently, their affinity with the host nation intensifies, indicating a gradual yet significant shift in their sense of belonging and identity. This transition reflects an interplay of time, experience, and age, illustrating how migration and prolonged immigration sculpt individuals' connections to their home and host countries. This phenomenon spotlights diasporic experiences, where personal history and the timing of emigration play critical roles in shaping one's relationship with the notion of 'home'. It suggests that the sentiments and attitudes of mobile Malaysians towards their country of origin are not merely residues of nostalgia but are deeply intertwined with their developmental experiences and the quintessential moments of their life transitions.

Amidst this common trend, especially after extended periods abroad, a notable perspective emerges among some participants. They claim to identify not just with their country of origin or their host nation but adopt a more expansive identity, considering themselves "citizens of the world" or "global citizens".

> E16: In London everyone is a stranger or is from elsewhere. In a way it's the best way to belong. We are all citizens of the world.

> E19: We rather call ourselves global citizens.

This aligns with Ossman's concept of the "serial migrant" discussed in section 4.3.3, a person who has relocated multiple times and identifies with more than two places develops a uniquely shaped identity that is distinct from that of typical immigrants. Their frequent relocations and diverse experiences contribute to a multifaceted sense of self that challenges traditional notions of migration and transnationalism. Participants E16 and E19 articulate a profound sense of

belonging that eclipses traditional national or cultural delineations. Residing in London, a city they describe as a melting pot where "everyone is from elsewhere", they embody a shared identity as "citizens of the world" or "global citizens". This perspective is rooted in "patterns of transnational affiliation" and "cosmopolitanism", where the notion of global rather than national citizenship prevails, as expounded by Barrett *et al*. in *Nationalism, Ethnicity, Citizenship: Multidisciplinary Perspectives* (2011: 2). Such a global orientation fosters a sense of unity and inclusivity, encouraging individuals to connect with a broader, more diverse community beyond the confines of their own cultural or national identities. Theresa May's remarks at the Conservative Party Conference, stating, "If you believe you're a citizen of the world, you're a citizen of nowhere. You don't understand what the very word 'citizenship' means," sparked considerable debate, viewed by some as a disparaging take on global citizenship (Bearak, 2016). This statement elicited a wave of responses, particularly from individuals who embrace their identity as global citizens. Amidst this discourse, the broader movement toward global citizenship is highlighted by data, such as the findings from a 2016 BBC World Service poll. This trend transcends individual opinions, showing that over 51% of respondents across various nations lean towards a global rather than a national identity (Grimley, 2016), illustrating that the sentiment expressed by E16 and E19 is reflective of a larger, global shift in how citizenship is perceived and embraced. This data exemplifies a significant shift toward global consciousness, reflecting an evolving sense of identity where individuals increasingly see themselves as integral parts of a vast, interconnected world. This shift from a singular national identity to a more inclusive global perspective signifies a deep-seated transformation in the way people perceive their place in the world, heralding a new era of global belonging and interconnectedness.

The experience of residing in cosmopolitan cities can foster a distinct sense of community belonging, as suggested by E22. These urban environments, characterised by their diverse cultural landscapes and inclusive ethos, provide a fertile ground for the emergence of a unique communal identity that resonates with individuals from varied backgrounds.

> E22: My feeling is that people don't truly feel like they belong. London is a mishmash of everything and everyone has all sorts of culture. It doesn't even feel that British in a way. You've probably got more foreigners and people not from London, people from everywhere trying to find better opportunities in London. So, I would say I don't feel like I belong, but I feel like we are a community of people who don't belong.

London being a "mishmash", a multicultural city with 26% who are non-EU nationals (ONS, 2022), where people from all over the world go to seek better prospects, could end up feeling a sense of community among those who feel they do not belong. Moreover, her observation about London not perceived as particularly "British" may reflect on the city's "super-diversity" (Vertovec, 2007: 1025) and its possible dilution of its traditional cultural identity, a bricolage of cultural identities (Phillimore *et al.*, 2021). On the one hand, the sense of belonging in a diverse and cosmopolitan city like London can bring about a sense of unity among those who share similar experiences and backgrounds: "a community of communities and not uniformity based on single substantive culture" (Parekh, 2000: 56). On the other hand, 23% of participants have shared their experience of unbelonging to the United Kingdom.

> E21: I think I'm comfortable, but I don't feel a sense of community.
>
> E68: For me, I don't quite feel I belong because the culture and food are very different. And obviously my family's not here, so it feels different. I never culturally felt that I belonged here. I suppose home will always be Malaysia.
>
> E10: I think the biggest reason is because I have brown skin. When I go into the shop, sometimes I'm being followed around in the shop by someone with an earpiece.

E21's sentiments of not experiencing a sense of community may indicate a disconnection, even amidst a generally comfortable environment. Such feelings could stem from a myriad of factors, including cultural disparities and the lack of a robust social network. This sense of detachment is paralleled in E68's narrative, who, despite being geographically distant, harbours a profound connection with Malaysia, her birthplace, suggesting an enduring attachment to its cultural mores and traditions. Moreover, E10's sense of unbelonging might have been exacerbated by an unsettling incident of discrimination at a store, further deepening her feelings of alienation. This incident echoes E52's experiences of feeling "a bit of alienation", illustrating how acts of discrimination or prejudice can profoundly affect Malaysian immigrants. Such negative encounters, rooted in ethnic or cultural biases, not only mar the individual's sense of belonging but also highlight a broader issue of exclusion from the societal mainstream, impacting their integration and identity within the community.

The question of isolation, disconnection and alienation merits examination. Khan postulated in *Is Britishness relevant?* (in Johnson, 2007: 22):

> Britain in 2006 is multicultural, multiracial and multi-religious, but in this country of multiple identities do all our citizens feel that they belong? The relevance of Britishness is to provide a unifying core to the many different citizens of these islands and their rich variety of backgrounds and histories. This is not just for people of colour, or those outside the Judaeo-Christian religions, or even the Scots and the Welsh – all of us have multiple identities, one of which is British.

For centuries, Britain has always been seen as a nation of immigrants, with the mélange of multiple identities (Colley, 1994; Parekh, 2000; Winder, 2005; Darwin, 2009, 2012; Race, 2015; Meer *et al*, 2016). It is even perhaps almost impossible to consider Britain other than by its "multicultural, multiracial and multi-religious" dimensions. However, it is also perhaps this very same mélange that could separate one identity from another. A large number of residents who reside in the United Kingdom would neither categorise themselves principally as British nor recognise the significance of Britishness (Khan, 2007; Parekh, 2000; Prabhat, 2018). In her research, Moya Jones examines the concept of Welsh identity in *Framing Welsh identity* (2008). She observes a notable shift in the self-identification patterns among the Welsh populace, with an increasing number identifying as "Welsh" or "more Welsh than British" (Jones, 2008: 21). This suggests a burgeoning "polarisation of national identity", alluding to an attraction to "Welshness", particularly in the era of globalisation, where maintaining "cultural or national distinctiveness" poses considerable challenges, and thus Wales is "re-inventing itself" (2008: 21-22). As such, despite the cultural diversity that exists in Britain, there remains a sense of tension between different communities, particularly in times of political and economic uncertainty (Parekh, 2000; Prabhat, 2018; Meer *et al*, 2016). The issue of national identity is complex and nuanced, and it is difficult to arrive at a single, universal definition of what it means to be British. Some argue that Britishness is rooted in a shared history and culture, while others view it as a more fluid and inclusive concept that can encompass a range of different ethnic, religious, and cultural backgrounds (Hall, 1991, 1999, 2008, 2017; Parekh, 2000; Johnson, 2007; Meer *et al*, 2016; Prabhat, 2018). In the end, the challenge facing contemporary Britain is how to create a sense of unity, equality and common purpose that can transcend these differences and build a more diverse, cohesive and inclusive society.

The quest for identity and sense of belonging through migration is a significant issue for many members of the Malaysian diaspora in the United Kingdom. While this community faces many challenges, there are also opportunities for growth, new perspectives and experiences, as

well as connections through shared cultural experiences and supportive communities. The findings have disclosed the numerous reasons that have influenced the individuals' sense of identity and belonging. Consequently, individuals often find themselves ambivalent about where they belong, as illustrated by Hall's own experience of being "suspended between two worlds" (2017: 203), with the addition of feeling alienated and disconnected for some. Despite this, it is worthwhile to note that there seems to be an increased sense of Malaysianness among some individuals in the way they navigate their sense of belonging, whether fully belonging or not belonging to British society. This suggests that for some, their cultural heritage and identity remain an important aspect of their self-identity, even as they negotiate their place in a new and unfamiliar society. The experience of identity and belonging is highly subjective and complex, marked by a spectrum of internal reflections and external interactions. It is therefore imperative for multicultural Britain to "reimagine itself" to ensure that every individual finds "a recognised place within the larger picture" (Parekh, 2000: 15), fostering a sense of belonging as an essential requirement "for solidarity and deliberative democracy in multicultural societies" such as this nation (Meer *et al*, 2016: 21).

5.2.4. Chapter summary

To summarise, the assimilation and integration of Malaysian immigrants in the United Kingdom are complex processes influenced by various socioeconomic, linguistic, and cultural factors. Notwithstanding the challenges encountered, a significant proportion of them appear to experience a sense of contentment. While there may be challenges and barriers to integration including confronting discrimination, homesickness, weather and cultural differences, there are also opportunities for cultural exchange and social interaction that can promote understanding and facilitate integration into British society. For some, elements such as accent acquisition; social participation through gastronomy, sports, parental involvement, faith-based observances, charity, pub culture activities, as well as resembling the locals through fashion and other elements, are key to their blending into the majority population. These elements appear to be important as the need to be regarded and included as members of a society rather than as outsiders/foreigners has been highlighted. Could these elements be reckoned as assimilation rather than integration? The fear of being different and unaccepted could play a role in migrating to a host country. However, could this fear hinder what would seem like a positive response to diversity? Indeed, adopting a positive attitude towards diversity would mean not having to choose between British identity and other cultural or religious identities. Instead, this positivity can be viewed as "complementary rather than conflicting" (Phillips, 2007: 45). It could be a way of living together through "tolerance, equality, respect for the dignity of the individual and a powerful tradition of dissent" (Phillips, 2007: 42). Growing up in multicultural Malaysia may have instilled a level of openness towards diversity, which is reflected in S08's narrative.

> S08: Living in Malaysia made me a bit more able to integrate and assimilate because growing up in Malaysia, with Chinese and Malay friends. I grew up knowing that there were different cultures, customs and languages. So, even though there's so much racial intolerance in Malaysia, growing up with the different cultures does actually make you more tolerant and open in a way. So, I made friends easily and I think speaking English does help.

Having been surrounded and influenced by diverse cultures, customs, and languages, Malaysians have developed the ability to assimilate and integrate into other multicultural societies like Canada and Australia, through liberalism and open-mindedness as facilitators of social connection and belonging (Parekh, 2000).

Investigating the assimilation and integration strategies of the diasporic Malaysians through narratives has given some insights into the ways in which they have transformed from being Malaysians having lived in Malaysia, a former British colony, to finding a new residence in the United Kingdom. With reference to participants' narratives, their migrations, which have been motivated by many reasons (discussed in part 4), suggest that the outcome of the adaptation strategies listed above has resulted in a degree of integration through assimilation for most of them. However, the participants' Malaysian sentiment might suggest that the efforts being made for "a stronger common sense of Britishness" still have a long way to go, even though these efforts may seem to be on the right path. IPPR's encouragement of Britishness with "multiculturalism that promotes 'parallel lives' or a form of cultural homogeneity that favours assimilation is both anathema to a multi-national and multi-faith Britain" (Cooper & Lodge, 2008: 13), allows a focus on social and cultural diversity. The United Kingdom has had an extraordinarily long period of tolerance towards people of all walks of life. Despite this, it is important to move "beyond mere toleration" and towards a deeper sense of acceptance and celebration of diverse identities and cultures, through "equality, fairness, dialogue, toleration, compromise, accommodation, recognition of and respect for diversity" (Parekh, 2000: 56). For in the context of "democratic equality" it is crucial to recognise that public respect for diverse cultural identities is fundamental, and that "the pressure to change, to compromise, to assimilate must not all be on the so-called minorities" (Parekh, 2000: 48). With the emphasis on the complexities and ambiguities of identity and belonging in an increasingly interconnected and globalised world, the notions of rootedness and authenticity are challenged by hybridity and transnationalism (Bhabha, 1994). By fostering a sense of belonging and cohesion across diverse communities, an all-encompassing sense of identity rooted in shared purpose and belonging may be possible to achieve in order to stay "afloat and have a sense of shared fate" (Loobuyck, 2015: 231) in a community of communities.

5.3. Hybrid ethnocultural identity

The focus of this research is to explore how Malaysian immigrants construct their ethnocultural identity as a result of migration and settlement experiences in the United Kingdom. The term "positionalities" described by Hall refers to the various points of identification that make up one's cultural identity, which are constructed from different parts of one's history (1990: 237). The concept of hybridity, which embraces diversity and fluidity, is used to understand how these immigrants live with and through differences in another space. This final chapter presents the major findings from the data collected which are analysed using mainly Hall's theory on cultural identity and diaspora and interconnect them with Bhabha's concepts of hybridity and Third Space, and K.J. Ratnam's loyalty to homeland, as well as other scholarly works on identity and belonging. I venture into understanding how Malaysian immigrants in the United Kingdom identify themselves and how identities are transformed in the British context. The findings are summarised and analysed to demonstrate the interrelationship between migration, settlement and sense of belonging through participants' accounts. I am guided by similarity and continuity, difference and rupture, "becoming" by hybridity and "Third Space", and loyalty to homeland (Hall, 1990; Bhabha, 1994; Ratnam, 2019). Through these lenses, I examine the ways in which Malaysian immigrants navigate their identities in a new context through their lived experiences, thus advancing knowledge on Malaysian immigrants in British society. By understanding the unique cultural traits of these immigrants and their aspirations, one can gain insight into their identities, highlighting the need to approach the discussion with sensitivity and awareness of the complexity of hybrid ethnocultural identity and its construction.

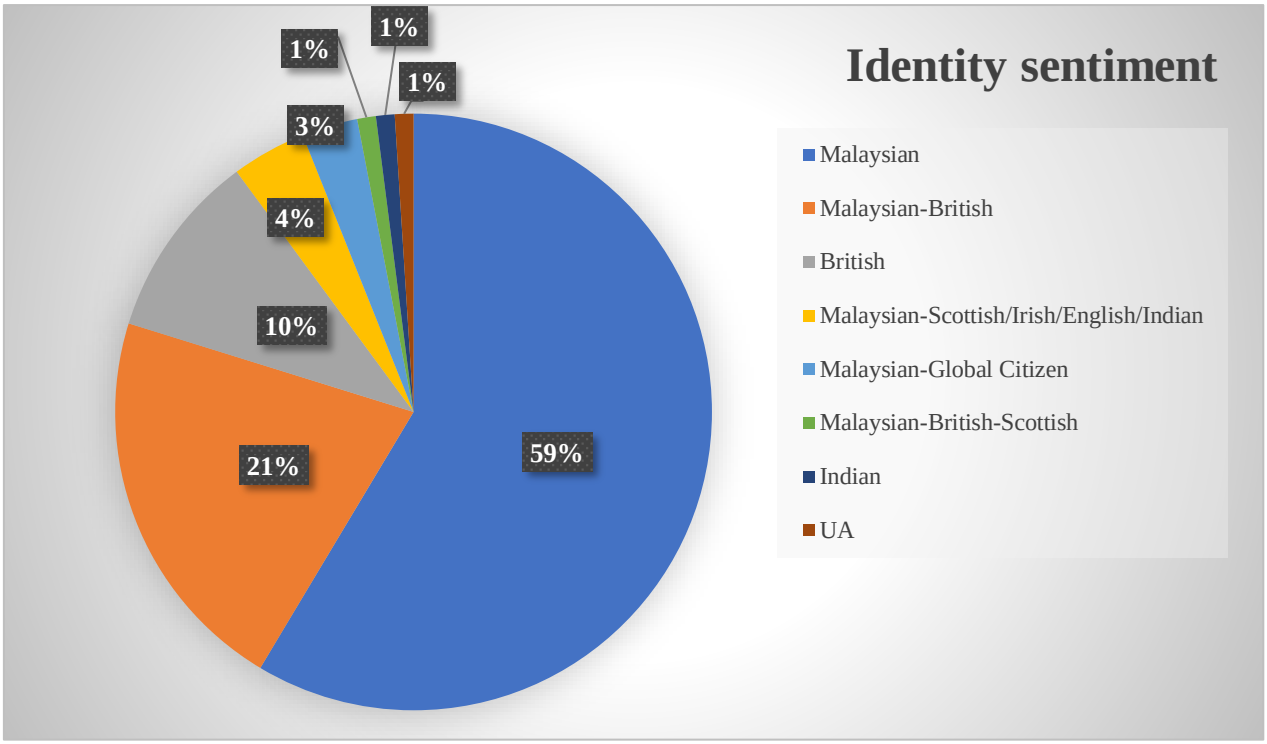

Figure 21: Identity sentiment in the UK

From the figure created based on the participants' self-identification in the United Kingdom, the prevalence of 59% identifying as Malaysian signifies a dominant cultural anchorage, influenced by factors such as heritage, loyalty, familial upbringing, and community cohesion. This predominant identification when examined through the lens of social identity theory, offers a nuanced understanding that suggests individuals derive their sense of self and esteem from their affiliations with specific groups. When framed within Maslow's hierarchy of needs (explored in 4.4.3), this theory extends to suggest that identifying strongly with a Malaysian identity not only provides a sense of belonging but also fulfils higher-level psychological needs, such as esteem and self-actualisation. In essence, group membership, particularly in the context of cultural identity, serves as a vital component in the individual's quest for a fulfilling and self-aware existence, grounding their sense of self in a broader social and cultural context.

The 21% of participants identifying as Malaysian-British exemplifies a significant occurrence of hybrid or dual identity, a phenomenon richly examined through the prism of acculturation theory. This theoretical framework delves into the processes through which individuals reconcile and integrate aspects of their native and adopted cultures. In the context of this study, from my point of view, the Malaysian-British identification underlines successful "acculturation attitudes" through assimilation and integration strategies where individuals do

not merely coexist with but actively incorporate elements of both cultures into their identity (Berry, 2008: 334). This process of assimilation/integration is not a mere blending of cultural elements; it is a dynamic and interactive process where individuals consciously select, negotiate, and amalgamate aspects of each culture in a way that is personally meaningful. This intentional synthesis of cultural identities can foster a heightened sense of global awareness and a nuanced understanding of cultural complexities, contributing to the individual's overall psychological well-being. The successful navigation of biculturalism, as indicated by this dual identification, is associated with a host of positive "psychological" and "sociocultural adaptations" (Berry, 2008: 334). Individuals who effectively integrate multiple cultural identities often exhibit greater social adaptability, showcasing an ability to navigate diverse social settings with ease and confidence.

The data revealing that 4% of participants identify as Malaysian combined with other identities such as English, Irish, Scottish, or Indian, alongside the 10% who identify solely as British, provides a vivid illustration of the diverse acculturation strategies within this group. This range of identities showcases the various ways individuals navigate and reconcile their cultural heritage with their present cultural context, embodying the spectrum of acculturation from separation to assimilation. Separation, as an acculturation strategy, is where individuals maintain a steadfast commitment to their heritage culture while minimising interaction with the host culture (Berry, 2008). This strategy is less evident in the hybrid identities but is a potential undercurrent in those who maintain a singular Malaysian identity. In contrast, assimilation occurs when individuals predominantly adopt the cultural norms, values, and practices of the host culture, diminishing the influence of their heritage culture, as possibly reflected by those identifying solely as British. The individuals who embrace mixed identities, such as Malaysian-English or Malaysian-Indian, serve as exemplars of the integration acculturation strategy. They intricately interlace elements from their heritage culture with those from the host culture, crafting a multifaceted and rich composite identity. This integration is not merely a juxtaposition but a synergistic amalgamation that fosters a nuanced worldview, enabling these individuals to navigate multiple cultural terrains with ease and dexterity. Their identities become a mosaic, reflecting varied cultural influences and providing them with a versatile repertoire of perspectives and practices.

On an intriguing note, there is a unique outlier within the spectrum of identities: 1% of the participants identify solely as Indian, which opens up a distinctive narrative in the context of acculturation and identity formation. This identification could suggest a variety of scenarios,

such as a strong affinity with Indian culture that may surpass or even reject the connection to their Malaysian heritage or the British context they are currently in. It could also reflect a situation where, despite being in a predominantly Malaysian and British context, this individual aligns more closely with another distinct ethnocultural identity, showcasing the diverse and individualistic nature of cultural affiliation. This singular identification as Indian amidst a largely Malaysian and British identifying group highlights the personal and unique journey of ethnocultural identity that each individual undertakes. It punctuates the idea that while broader societal forces and community affiliations significantly shape one's identity, personal experiences, individual choices, and unique life narratives play a crucial role in the ultimate articulation of one's cultural identity.

The emergence of identities that encompass multiple cultural elements, such as those identifying as Global citizens or with hybrid identities like Malaysian-British-Scottish, reflects a cosmopolitan identity framework. This framework resonates with contemporary theories of globalisation and transnationalism, which argue that in an interconnected world, identities can transcend the traditional boundaries of nation-states. Such cosmopolitan identities suggest a profound shift in how individuals perceive themselves and their place in the world. Instead of viewing identity through a singular cultural or national lens, these individuals embrace a more fluid and inclusive understanding of identity that incorporates diverse cultural influences. This perspective aligns with the concept of global citizenship, where individuals recognise and engage with the interconnectedness of the world, acknowledging their role and responsibility within a global community. This cosmopolitan approach to identity is indicative of a broader cultural and social phenomenon where the rigid boundaries of identity are becoming increasingly permeable due to factors such as transnational migration, global communication, and international collaboration. Individuals with such identities often exhibit heightened empathy and understanding of different cultures, along with a commitment to global issues that transcend local or national concerns. The identification with a global citizenship or a complex, multilayered identity like Malaysian-British-Scottish is emblematic of an evolving global landscape where cultural exchange and hybridisation are commonplace. This evolution reflects a world where identities are not just inherited or geographically determined but actively constructed and chosen, resulting in a richer and more diverse human identity that is better suited to the complexities of the globalised 21st century.

The diverse range of identities observed in this group not only foregrounds the concept of identity fluidity—acknowledging that personal identities evolve with changing life

circumstances and environments—but also embraces the notion of intersectionality, which highlights the symbiosis of various identity facets like culture, nationality, and ethnicity, creating unique lived experiences and perceptions of identity. This array of acculturation strategies illuminates aspects of cultural adaptation, showcasing how individuals navigate their identity in relation to their heritage and the ambient cultural milieu. The exploration of these identities offers a fertile ground for delving into theories and practices concerning identity formation and negotiation, emphasising the versatile nature of cultural identity in a multicultural context. This analysis provides empirical insights that can enhance theories on how cultural settings influence individual identities and informs practical strategies in policy and intervention design, aiming to accommodate the complex identity landscapes in diverse societies. Echoing the methodologies of Abes and Jones (2003; 2007) and Jones (2009), who utilised an autoethnographic and intersectional lens to probe the construction and negotiation of identities amidst the presence of multiple identity elements, this approach integrates the intricate layers of identity formation. Although my research is not explicitly labelled as intersectional, it adopts a comparable methodological stance, considering multiple identity-related factors, including ethnicity, culture, religion, and language, thereby providing a holistic understanding of the identity construction process in a multicultural framework.

Identities can also be influenced by situational factors, leading individuals to emphasise different aspects of their identity depending on the social context. This means that people may adjust their behaviour and communication style in order to fit into various groups or situations, giving prominence to different elements of their identity accordingly. For instance, some might emphasise their professional identity in a work environment, their cultural identity when engaging with their community, and their personal identity with close friends and family. This "situational" identity allows individuals to navigate and adapt to different social contexts, but it can also result in a fragmented sense of self and a feeling of disconnection between various aspects of one's identity (Huntington, 2004). While theoretical models of identity may necessitate knowledge on stages of growth and dimensions of identity development that can provide useful frameworks for understanding general patterns, the complexity of lived experiences often falls short of capturing the full richness and diversity of individual experiences through narrow categories and only partially reflects narratives of identity. Hall's thesis provides a theoretical framework that acknowledges both differences and similarities within groups recognising that difference is present in everyday life and emphasising the need to embrace it. In today's globalised world, where people and information flow relatively freely

across borders, it is undeniable that we operate within a spectrum of differences (Appadurai, 1990). 'Living with and through difference' means recognising that individuals from diverse ethnocultural backgrounds, experiences, and identities share the same spaces, possibly by creating their own 'Third Space' (Hall, 1990; Bhabha, 1994).

In the following sections, I will analyse the participants' narratives on how they identify themselves ethnoculturally post-migration in the United Kingdom, and how their sense of identity has been shaped and transformed by their migration experiences. Here I explore and analyse how participants expressed their connection to their country of birth and cultural heritage, emphasising the role of memory, emotional attachment or detachment, loyalty, and identification. The majority of participants regarded their birth country as an essential part of their life journey, their integration and sense of belonging in the new host country, and consequently the way their identity has been shaped. Moreover, from my observation, the length of time they have lived in the host country might affect their level of attachment to or detachment from their heritage culture. According to Hall, while "national cultures into which we are born are one of the principal sources of cultural identity" (2006: 253), the fact that we are born into national cultures does not mean that we automatically possess predetermined national identities from birth. Instead, national identifications are not fixed or static, but rather they are shaped and altered through various forms of representation (Hall, 2006). What Hall suggests is that our sense of belonging to a nation is not just a matter of birth, but also a product of cultural and social influences. He emphasises the fluidity and dynamism of national identities, challenging the notion that they are inherent or unchanging. He underscores the role of representation in shaping these identities, which include media, literature, art, and other cultural practices that represent or express the nation in some way. From the participants' narratives, I observed that the focus on their sense of identity and belonging has little to do with politics. Rather, they discuss belonging in the context of cultural interactions and identity.

This chapter delves into how the experience of living in two different cultures can shape participants' identities, leading them to perceive their sense of belonging either to Malaysia or the United Kingdom, or "in-between". Nonetheless, the research has evidenced that the participants take pride in their ethnocultural background, in that they almost always cited their Malaysian identity, contributing to an inherent sense of loyalty to their birth country (Ratnam, 2019). The primary focus of this research concentrates on examining the influence of British culture on the Malaysian identity within the context of the United Kingdom, within the conceptual frameworks of Hall's "being" and "becoming", Bhabha's "cultures in-between",

and Ratnam's loyalty to homeland. The first objective of my research is to comprehend and analyse the development of the participants' identities and how they evolve and "become" in the diaspora. The second objective is to investigate the impact of British culture on the participants' identity. The third objective is to explore whether the participants have developed an "in-between" space in the ethnocultural identity, or if their identities include aspects of both British and Malaysian cultures that have created a hybrid space.

5.3.1. Being as one 'true identity'

The similarities and continuities observed among the participants' experiences were apparent in the belief held by some participants who conserved their pre-migration identities and resisted change to a certain extent. By asserting that they remained unchanged, they sought to portray themselves as stable individuals, despite having gone through transitional experiences. However, this assertion represents a complex expression that transcends mere declarations of loyalty or stability. It could serve as a defensive mechanism to manage the anxiety associated with cultural displacement and the difficulties of assimilating into a new environment. By claiming a steadfast identity, these individuals might be trying to reassure themselves and their community of their unwavering connection to their roots, despite the inevitable influences and changes induced by a new cultural setting. This insistence on an unchanged identity might also be a response to internal or external expectations to remain loyal to one's culture, serving as evidence of their resilience against the forces of cultural assimilation. What is often left unsaid in these assertions is the complexity of their transitional experience. The silent acknowledgment of change and adaptation might be concealed behind the overt declarations of fidelity. This hidden narrative could involve a struggle to balance the integration into the new culture while preserving the essence of their original identity, reflecting a nuanced process of 'becoming' that does not fully abandon the 'being'—their 'true identity'. The concept of loyalty to their homeland, in this context, could be both a conscious choice and an unconscious response to the diasporic condition in which the sense of belonging is continuously negotiated and redefined. The unspoken aspect of their experience might include a subtle drift in identity, where new elements are incorporated and old ones are reinterpreted, leading to a dynamic state of cultural hybridity, even if the overt narrative is one of unchangeability. Thus, the assertion of unchanged identity and strong homeland attachment may mask a deeper, more complex process of cultural negotiation and identity reconstruction, reflecting the inherent tensions in navigating between the familiarity of the past and the uncertainties of the new cultural landscape.

Scholars in migration studies concur that immigrants redefine their identities during the migration process, which is consistent with Hall's and Bhabha's theories on identity (Gupta & Omoniyi, 2007; Lucassen *et al*, 2010; Benson & O'Reilly, 2016; D'Angelo *et al*, 2015). As stated by Hall, identities are not fixed or guaranteed. His theory suggests that identities are constantly being constructed, belonging to both the future and the past. This implies that identities are continuously undergoing a process of transformation. The participants in my

research shaped their identities by defining themselves in relation to their ethnocultural backgrounds. Hall (1996) asserted that our ethnic identities play a significant role in shaping our subjective understanding of ourselves. He argued that these identities form the foundation upon which we construct narratives about our lives, allowing us to establish a sense of our origins and heritage. About 81% of the participants in this research identified themselves either partially or fully as Malaysians. During the process of narrating their lived experiences, some participants expressed a sense of being unchanged. For example, E08, E11, and E33 insisted that they would always remain the same, that is to say, always Malaysian.

> E08: I'm always Malaysian because that's where I was born. I've always travelled, spent so many years in Australia before moving to England. But I am always Malaysian at heart. But we all evolve with time, with the place that you are, in the culture, the people you surrounded by. So, I identify myself as a Malaysian living in England.
>
> E11: Definitely identify as an open-minded Malaysian. I always say I am Malaysian. But having lived here for 25 years, I am British in my humour, sensibilities and thinking.
>
> E33: I would say I identify more as being Malaysian as opposed to being British, for the simple reason that I'm just trying to work desperately to hold on to something that I once had. And I'm trying to instil in my kids that part of them is always half Malaysian.

These excerpts showcase participants grappling with their identities and the influences of different countries on their sense of self. They illustrate the complexities of multicultural experiences and the ways in which individuals navigate their evolving identities, while acknowledging their Malaysian identity as a core aspect of who they are as a way of maintaining a strong connection to their Malaysian roots. Their statements reflect an understanding that identity can transform within the temporal and spatial dimensions, suggesting a blend of cultural influences and an ability to adapt to new social norms through "British humour, sensibilities and thinking" (E11). The sense of sentiment and urgency in maintaining a connection to her Malaysian identity is conveyed in E33's narrative, reflecting a deep attachment to cultural roots and a desire to pass them on to the next generation (Brown, 2006; Cohen & Fischer, 2019). E33's statement, "I'm just trying to work desperately to hold on to something that I once had", warrants deeper exploration as it encapsulates a profound

emotional and psychological process. This statement suggests a struggle to maintain a connection with her past self or cultural identity amidst the pressures of adaptation and change in a new context. It reflects a sense of loss or nostalgia for what was familiar and a desire to preserve a core aspect of identity that feels threatened by the new environment. Delving into this, one could examine the layers of identity preservation, cultural continuity and change. This narrative reveals how individuals navigate their sense of self in the face of transformative experiences, highlighting the tension between the need to adapt and the desire to remain connected to one's roots. It also opens an avenue to discuss the emotional labour involved in this process and the potential impacts on mental well-being and social integration. The narrative of desperately trying to hold onto something from the past connects intriguingly with the observation that participants view their identity as singular and continuous, suggesting a consistent sense of self over time. This continuous sense of identity aligns with what Hall referred to as "a sort of collective 'one true self' hiding inside the many others, more superficial or artificially imposed 'selves'" (1990: 223). In this context, Hall discusses the notion of having multiple identities that collectively contribute to the sense of self. He highlights how the concept of a "true self" emerges and is rooted in cultural norms and historical perspectives. In other words, the participant cohort in the research adopted and utilised those cultural discourses and understandings as necessary to construct their identities. Although many participants attested to feeling "completely Malaysian" (E21) as a collective identification, having lived in the United Kingdom for an extended period of time has had an impact on their identity, embedding some aspects of British culture.

While the concept of "true self" encompasses aspects of collective identification, some participants shared how they express themselves in a space I refer to as *true space*. What this term means is that some participants behave differently in their homes than they do outside, aligning with Goffman's performance theory (Goffman, 1959). For example:

> E10: So, when I'm at home, I'm more Malaysian. I read Malaysian news, watch my Malaysian films and dramas.
>
> E19: In terms of Malaysian humour, I still retain quite a lot of that. Me and my wife, we tend to be quite relaxed when we are in each other's company. We say our *lah*s, speak Malay if we don't really want my daughter to understand what we're talking about. I guess we really do retain that culture

> and combine tonnes of languages in a single sentence. So, we are still very much Malaysian that way, and we feel quite natural when in that situation.

These statements provide insight into their natural habits when at home in a different country. E10 expresses a strong connection to her Malaysian roots, as evidenced by her consumption of Malaysian news and entertainment, which suggests a desire to stay informed and engaged with her home country's affairs and culture. Participant E19 accentuates this concept through the preservation of Malaysian humour and the use of the Malay language as a means of confidential communication within his family. This strategic linguistic choice serves as a mechanism to maintain a private conversation, especially highlighted in E19's intention to exclude his daughter from certain conversations, as he candidly remarks, "if we don't really want my daughter to understand what we're talking about". This practice underlines language as a tool for social boundary-making, in this case with his daughter. In sociolinguistics, language choice can create and reinforce in-group and out-group[30] distinctions, facilitating a sense of belonging among in-group members while excluding others. In E19's case, the use of Malay acts as a subtle yet potent means of creating a private sphere, underscoring the language's role as a carrier of cultural identity and a medium for encoding and maintaining a connection to his cultural roots, while asserting his cultural identity amidst a possibly dominant English-speaking environment. Simultaneously, it indicates a nuanced approach to parenting, where language becomes a tool for modulating the flow of information and interaction within the family. My hypothesis is that it becomes a deliberate medium for E19 and his wife to discuss matters they prefer to keep from their daughter, illustrating a thoughtful use of language to navigate family dynamics and maintain privacy.

The use of "*lahs*"[31] and the code-switching of languages suggest that these cultural practices provide a sense of comfort and naturalness. These practices are not merely about linguistic convenience; they encapsulate a deeper cultural and psychological resonance for the speakers. As highlighted by Mukherji and David, code-switching serves as more than a communicative tactic; it is a nuanced expression of identity and belonging.

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[30] Dillon characterises in-groups as social collectives where an individual identifies as a member, such as family, friends, neighbourhoods, and colleagues, experiencing a sense of affiliation and unity. In contrast, out-groups are those groups against which an individual holds feeling of disdain, opposition, or competitiveness, recognising that their typical experiences and perceptions differ significantly from those of the in-group. (2020: 287)

[31] "Lah" is a common word used in Malaysia and Singapore, often found in colloquial language like Manglish (Malaysian Colloquial English) and Singlish (Singapore Colloquial English). It is a particle that does not have a specific meaning by itself, but is used to add emphasis to sentences.

> Code-switching has emerged as a lingua franca even in formal interactions, and the preference of English mixed with some words from the speakers' mother tongue has become a trend (see David et al. 2009). […] In Malaysia, code-switching has become an effective linguistic option to perform many functions (see David 2006a, 2006b). For Malaysians, code-switching aids in making meaning and in getting meaning across efficiently and effectively. It has become normative to code-switch, in both formal and informal settings, in both in-group and out-group encounters, and for a whole range of reasons (see David 2000). (2011: 21)

The articulation suggests that this linguistic blending allows an expression of one's true self in a space that is dedicated as a *true space* for pure self-expression without any performativity. This "backstage behaviour", to use Goffman's terminology, is where individuals engage in actions and discourse free from the performative elements required in more public or formal interactions, and in a way maintain primordial bonds to their homeland (Goffman, 1959: 128). Thus, the practice of code-switching in Malaysia, especially as detailed in this study, is not just a linguistic convenience; it is a testament to the enduring connection to one's cultural heritage and an emblem of identity in a multicultural landscape. It exemplifies how language serves as a vital tool in the preservation and expression of cultural identity, enabling individuals to maintain a link to their homeland and express their authentic selves within a global context.

Most participants were very outspoken about their identity in relation to their birth country, giving salience to their Malaysian identity. Their discussions went beyond simply describing themselves as Malaysians. They also emphasised how they desired to be perceived as such by others with whom they interacted. I sensed a need, on the part of several participants, to educate others about the ethnocultural composition of Malaysia rather than ignore the perception that all Malaysians are Malay or Muslim. The construction of identity, rooted in one's country of birth, establishes a foundational point of reference that signifies their origins. This element serves as a marker that informs individuals about their roots and origins. The question of where they came from may not necessarily stem from mere geographical location, from simple questions of origin, place of birth, where they were brought up or where they have lived most of their lives. Some participants regarded the question with scepticism, and their responses were "depend[ent] on who's asking that question" (S05).

> S05: For the local Brits, when asked where I come from, I say I'm from Malaysia. The second question that will be asked is, "Are you Muslim?" And that annoys me because there are just a lot of assumptions about the country. I remember one time being asked by a lady who works with the United Nations where I was from. When I said from Malaysia, "Oh that's interesting. I didn't know that China is part of Malaysia." […] They also automatically just assume you're Malay. This is a very hard concept for people to grapple with because, in Britain, you have British Chinese and British Indian and everyone gets that but when it comes to Malaysia, people just don't get that. So, you have to give history and geography lessons. It's so long but Malaysian society is just so rich. There's just so many opportunities to study… the societal themes that you can't get anywhere else.

The automatic assumptions of being Muslim or that all Malaysians are of Malay ethnicity upon associating with the country oversimplify the cultural and religious diversity within Malaysia. Furthermore, mistakenly assuming that China is part of Malaysia demonstrates a lack of geographical and historical knowledge and understanding which overlooks the multiethnic and multicultural nature of Malaysian society. These assumptions call for the need to constantly provide "history and geography lessons" to correct these misconceptions and, by extension, highlight the richness of Malaysian society and the numerous opportunities it offers for studying various "societal themes". S05's narrative sheds light on her lived experience as a Malaysian in the United Kingdom, particularly on the ethnocultural assumptions and misunderstandings encountered and the need to educate her acquaintances for greater understanding of Malaysia's ethnocultural diversity. Given that individuals may lack facts about Malaysia's diverse culture and heritage, it becomes imperative to impart such knowledge. This step not only enhances their understanding but also reinforces the participants' position as Malaysians in the process. This suggests that identity construction is situational and "positioned" (Hall, 1993: 222). For E73, she positions herself as a "self-appointed cultural ambassador" in order to "sell" her culture through active promotion of her culture and heritage.

> E73: I am a self-appointed cultural ambassador. I take every opportunity to "sell" my cultures. I tell folklores… share cultural festivals… wear traditional outfit to commemorate celebration/memorial days. One time a British colleague asked about my *baju kurung* and said it's Malaysia's

> Independence Day. The colleague then asked "Independence from who? Oh… it's us, isn't it?" It was a very funny conversation.

This narrative describes engaging in a light-hearted and humorous conversation about her ethnocultural background, necessitating some historical context (much like S05), illustrating the importance of dialogue in bridging cultural gaps and fostering cross-cultural understanding for a greater appreciation and understanding of different cultural backgrounds. This is further exemplified in E55's statement, where she "definitely feel[s] Malaysian amongst the Brits". Her position as a Malaysian residing in the United Kingdom signifies the distinct identity that sets her apart from the majority population and highlights the dynamic interconnection between her own heritage and the cultural environment in which she finds herself, embodying one "true" identity.

The way participants described their experiences during the settlement process differed, indicating that their formation of identities was situational and thus unique. The settlement phase serves as a liminal space between leaving their birth country and entering another country, where participants began to be identified as Malaysians in ways that had not been attributed to them before when they were residing in Malaysia. Within this setting, the fluidity in shaping identities becomes more apparent through the positions taken. The impact of historical events and spatiality over time shape "who we have become" (Hall, 1993: 225) and plays a role in constructing cultural identities. The past, present and future are interconnected: personal identity (who one is), national identity (where one came from), and the experiences of migration and settlement (what one has and might become). History and culture are integral to the understanding of self, one's connection to a nation, and one's experience of migration and settlement. They provide the backdrop against which identities are constructed, foster a sense of belonging, and shape the trajectories one embarks upon in life. The historical categorisation of Malaysian immigrants is primarily based on ethnicity, religion and nationality. In reference to participants' encounters, there is a prevailing notion that all Malaysians are Malay, Muslim and of Asian descent. However, this limited perception fails to acknowledge the diverse ethnic composition of Malaysia's population. Insofar that many Malaysians feel that it is necessary to "give history and geography lessons" (S05) or ""sell" cultures" (E73) to those who are unfamiliar or have misconceptions about who Malaysians are.

The participants in my research recognised the misconception surrounding Malaysia's ethnic composition but viewed it as a result of ignorance rather than a deliberate attempt to

disparage. While it is true that a majority of Malaysians have Asian ancestry, Malaysia's historical landscape reveals a blend of Malays, *Orang Asli*, Chinese, Indians, British, European, Portuguese and Dutch influences (explored in 2.2). The participants strongly believed that perpetuating the notion of Malaysia as exclusively Malay misrepresented the nation and undermined the significance of its diverse ethnic heritage. They took pride in discussing their ancestral nation, as evident in Malaysia's coat of arms motto *Bersekutu Bertambah Mutu* (Unity is Strength) (the official gateway of *The Government of Malaysia*) and Malaysia's Tourism motto "Malaysia, Truly Asia" (Malaysia Tourism Promotion Board). The importance of cultural education to challenge preconceived notions about Malaysia and to promote a more nuanced understanding of its identity was often on the agenda of the participants. This highlights the necessity of dispelling the notion of a monolithic Malaysian identity, as pointed out by S05, which echoes many of the participants' narratives.

As a side note, the observation of the limited knowledge about Malaysia among British individuals may be compared with their deeper awareness of India, necessitating a micro-exploration of the various factors—historical, educational, and media-related—that shape public perceptions in the United Kingdom. The profound awareness of India within British consciousness can be largely attributed to the historical ties that date back to the era when India was considered the *Jewel in the crown* of the British empire. This historical relationship has been deeply embedded in British culture and education, creating a complex and lasting connection that has influenced various aspects of British society, from literature[32] and history to political and economic relations. This historical context has ensured that India remains a significant part of the British educational curriculum, often highlighted in discussions about colonialism, cultural exchange, and historical ties. The enduring impact of this relationship is further reinforced by the Indian diaspora's prominent presence in the United Kingdom, which actively contributes to British society, culture, and economy, keeping Indian heritage and issues in the public eye. In contrast, while Malaysia's history is also intertwined with British colonialism, its narrative has not been as foregrounded in the British consciousness. Malaysian history and its subsequent independence might be a footnote in the broader context of British colonial history, leading to a lesser degree of familiarity and understanding among the British populace. The narrative of Malaysia's cultural and historical background, including its struggle for independence and development into a modern nation, is not as widely disseminated or

[32] R.K. Narayan, Salman Rushdie, Arundhati Roy, Aravind Adiga, Kiran Desai, etc.

understood in the United Kingdom. Furthermore, Malaysian literature[33] in English is scarcely featured in British educational or literary spheres. This lack of exposure contributes to the limited understanding and appreciation of Malaysia's diverse heritage in the United Kingdom.

Furthermore, media representation has been instrumental in shaping perceptions. Indian narratives and actors[34] frequently feature in British media, enhancing public familiarity with India. In contrast, Malaysian actors[35] and stories are less visible, affecting the level of public awareness and understanding of Malaysia's cultural and historical depth in the United Kingdom. Thus, the disparity in knowledge and awareness about these two countries among British individuals is not merely incidental but is rooted in the historical depth of engagement, the extent of educational focus, and the breadth of media representation, all of which collectively shape public perception and consciousness. The participants' awareness of misconceptions about Malaysia's ethnic diversity—viewed as ignorance rather than malice—highlights the challenges in international representation of nations. The existential aspect of the embodied self within the world profoundly impacts individuals' self-presentation and perception when entering a new setting. The initial engagements in this new environment render individuals susceptible to others' "judgements" (Dolezal, 2012: 13). Such judgements can prompt a range of self-disclosures or concealments, whether deliberate or unconscious (Dolezal, 2012). The manner in which individuals articulate their identities—be it as a visible minority: Chinese or Indians, or of Asian descent in general—demonstrates the significant role of others' gaze in moulding the impressions they convey and discern in their new social milieu. This interaction resonates with the lifeworld's relational dimension, underscoring that lived experiences are intrinsically relational, with individuals perpetually interpreting their identities in relation to the people they meet (Dolezal, 2012). Malaysia's complex ethnic mosaic, influenced by a variety of cultures including Malay, Chinese, Indian, and indigenous groups, alongside European colonial legacies, is not widely appreciated abroad. Thus, the pride participants have in Malaysia's cultural diversity, as demonstrated through national mottos and tourism campaigns, indicates their desire to correct misunderstandings and advocate for a nuanced recognition of Malaysia's identity.

[33] Tash Aw, Zen Cho, Preeta Samarasan, Rani Manicka, Hanna Alkaf, etc.
[34] Shahrukh Khan, Amitabh Bachchan, Salman Khan, Deepika Padukone, Alia Bhatt, Priyanka Chopra Jonas, Aiswarya Rai, etc.
[35] Michelle Yeoh, Henry Golding, Ronny Chieng, Nigel Ng, Yuna, etc.

From my observation, the majority of the participants identified Malaysia as their birth country. E08 viewed that because she was born in Malaysia, being "always Malaysian" was perceived as a national identity fixed at birth, resonating with S01 and other participants who also stated they are still "Malaysian rather than British" in all honesty. Despite acknowledging that she had undergone changes influenced by "time, place, culture, and people" encircling her, she maintained her unwavering loyalty to her Malaysian identity. She firmly identified herself as "a Malaysian living in England", not even considering the notion of having a hyphenated identity. In support of E08's view, despite having resided for more than 20 years and integrated some British cultural elements, E11 was firm on her position as a Malaysian, although one would assume based on her narrative that she would have adopted a hyphenated identity: British-Malaysian. Contrarily, E42 and E71 presented counterexamples as participants born in Malaysia but who spent their early childhood in the United Kingdom. With slightly differing time frames, both participants still identified as Malaysians.

> E42: I'm Malaysian before I am British. My cultural identity is definitely Malaysian because I think it's that multi cultured-ness.
>
> E71: Malaysian born with a British background. My mum is British, so moved between the two places. But the first 19 years I lived there [in Malaysia], and we came over here for holiday… some family was here. I always knew I was coming here to study and stuff.

E42 boldly asserted that she was Malaysian despite having been raised in the United Kingdom from early childhood, then moved back to Malaysia for 10 years before returning to the United Kingdom (supplementary excerpt in 5.3.1), suggesting that she identifies more strongly with her Malaysian heritage and considers it a fundamental aspect of her identity. E42 highlighted her ethnocultural identity as attributable to the "multi-culturedness" of Malaysia, giving an indication of how much she values multicultural diversity. Although born in Malaysia, E71 stresses her mixed heritage and experiences of living in Malaysia and the United Kingdom. The fact that E71's mother is British implies that her culture and heritage are tied to Britain; however, because she was born in Malaysia, she identified as a Malaysian, which may be linked to her nationality. Both narratives illustrate the fluidity of national identification, aligning with Hall's argument that, although their place of birth may define how they truly feel about their identity, fixed notions of national identity can restrict possibilities beyond national boundaries. Identifying oneself on the sole basis of one's country of birth may reduce an individual to a

homogeneous identity, which serves as a way of sharing similarities with a group or nation but obscures the potential of an essential 'true' self.

For Ratnam, as expounded in 3.3.4, it seems that identity is intricately "associated with citizenship" and the "state's claim to supremacy", and "the loyalty that is expected to go with that identity, […] ethnic and religious sentiments" (2019: *preface*). The supremacy claimed by the state can be seen in how it defines national identity and imposes loyalty expectations on its citizens. This can sometimes lead to tensions between individual identities and the collective national identity promoted by the state. Ethnic and religious sentiments can also play a significant role in shaping identities. In multiethnic and multireligious societies like Malaysia, these factors can significantly influence how individuals perceive their identity and their sense of belonging within the nation state. Hall's argument emphasises that the idea of "where we came from" is not universally fixed but holds significance in the construction of identity for the participants in this research. This importance is linked to the perception that their worldview began to take shape in their birth country. Consequently, in order to comprehend the new country of residence they have immigrated to, participants turned to their heritage culture as a means to interpret their identity. However, these interpretations are not predetermined or easily understood.

I interpret this aspect of the discussion about homeland loyalty and "where we came from" beyond the physical location of Malaysia (see 3.3.4 on homeland loyalty). Loyalty to Malaysia transcends geographical boundaries, manifesting in the host society through the connections and interactions within the diasporic Malaysian community. However, this sense of loyalty is not monolithic; it can lead to feelings of disloyalty or conflict when individuals confront and possibly resist the values and policies of their host country, juxtaposing them with those of their homeland. Their recollections of Malaysia, their anticipations about life in the United Kingdom, and the subsequent realities they encounter illuminate the shifting contours of their Malaysian 'true identity'. This identity, once anchored in the Malaysian context, is now being renegotiated in the diaspora, influenced by new social, cultural, and political landscapes. Being Malaysian in Malaysia is intrinsically different from being Malaysian in the United Kingdom, as the diasporic experience introduces new meaning and dimensions, challenging one's sense of self and belonging. For many, the family and community they left behind remain a critical anchor, providing a sense of continuity and a reservoir of sociocultural capital that they draw upon to navigate their new lives. This process involves leveraging their cultural knowledge and networks to establish themselves, maintain connections to their homeland, and

forge new identities in the context of their experiences in the United Kingdom. Their experiences exemplify the ongoing transformation that occurs, validating Hall's concept of identity as a never-ending process (1990). The disruptions caused by migration, such as integrating into a new family, striving to uphold the values and beliefs instilled since birth, and pursuing personal success, present them with both challenges and opportunities during the settlement process.

5.3.2. The process of becoming: a hybrid “Third Space” identity

The quest for identity is convoluted by the fact that many members of the Malaysian diaspora in the United Kingdom interviewed for the purpose of this research are first-generation immigrants. Typically, discussions about immigrant generations refer to the first generation as those who have migrated from one country to another. Their offspring, born in the new country, are referred to as the second generation, and their grandchildren constitute the third generation, and so forth. The second-generation immigrants are those who are born in the country to one or more parents who were born abroad. They are naturally born in the relocated country and are not considered immigrants but instead as citizens, and may identify solely as British or as hyphenated, therefore being polycultural (Kelley, 1999; Prashad, 2001; Winder, 2005). The idea of polyculturalism examines how historical and ongoing interactions and exchanges between different cultural groups have influenced and shaped the cultural norms and practices within each respective culture. However, these definitions can vary within each generation, as individuals’ experiences may differ greatly depending on factors such as their age at the time of immigration, cultural background, socioeconomic status, education level, and more. For instance, studies by the Pew Research Center (2015) have found that second-generation Americans tend to advance more quickly socially and economically than the first-generation immigrants who preceded them. Herman & Jacobs (2015) observed that second-generation migrants often have a more profound sense of belonging to their country of residence compared to those of the first generation. Being a citizen of the state can positively affect certain elements of political participation, particularly political interest and activism. While these trends may be generally observed, they may not apply universally to all generations of migrants due to factors such as the country of origin, the country of residence, and the individual’s personal experiences, among others.

While the participants in my research had offspring born in the United Kingdom and thus belong to the second-generation cohort, several points were discussed about their lived experiences. However, they do not constitute the participant cohort of this research because my focus was only on the first-generation cohort. The first-generation Malaysian immigrants have been living in the United Kingdom for several decades, for some, and may feel a sense of displacement or fragmentation as they navigate between their birth country and sociocultural practices in the British context. The struggle to reconcile their traditional values and customs with the norms and values of British society is evident, and some feel pressured to assimilate into British culture leading to feelings of being torn between their Malaysian identity and that

of the British. In order to reconcile their Malaysian identity, attempts have been made by forming a new sense of belonging through the various means discussed in 5.3. Undergoing a process of identity transformation is inevitable for some Malaysian immigrants as they navigate a new environment, experiences, and challenges, involving a "re-creation of traditions" […] a new vision of old dreams […] a renewal", which "paves the way for new vitality and immediacy" (Kapur-Dromson, 2007: preface xii). This process involves a shift in their values, beliefs, and sense of self, as they adapt to the British lifestyle. In the presence of different groups, individuals might shift their identities, resulting in the emergence of multiple identities or a "situational" identity, as discussed in 5.3 and 5.3.1, that dictate their interactions with others (Huntington, 2004). This suggests that identities are not fixed but fluid—or hybrid—and can change depending on the social context. It means that an individual can identify differently depending on the group they are interacting with at a given time. Many identities, some exclusive, others overlapping, and the loyalties that accompany these identities can influence social interactions and political dynamics, contributing to the overall stability or instability of a society (Ratnam, 2019).

E04 arrived in the United Kingdom at the age of 22 and has been living there for more than 20 years now. The meaning of self-identification goes beyond her Malaysian identity. When asked about her identity, she explained that the way she integrated into British society marked the beginning of her identity transformation.

> E04: I would say I have a hyphenated identity because deep inside in my core, I am still 100% Malaysian. I feel Malaysian. So, in my mind, Malaysia comes first. But being here for 23 years, I've integrated into this culture, this community, immersed in the British culture. I've lived here now longer than I've lived in Malaysia. So, I feel British as well. So, I would say British-Malaysian.

Granting the fact that E04 feels "100% Malaysian" indicating a strong sense of core and primacy that leans towards her Malaysian identity, factors such as length of settlement, integration, and immersion into British culture and community imply that she has adapted to and embraced local customs, traditions, and ways of life during that time. As a result of E04's experiences and the amalgamation of two cultural influences, her self-perception demonstrates a hyphenated identity that encompasses both Malaysian and British aspects, or polycultural, as previously cited. This form of adaptable identity that Hall (1990) and Bhabha (1994) theorise

as a way of thinking through "becoming by hybridity" reverberates in E16, E37 and UA02's narratives.

> E16: I feel both British and Malaysian. I always refer to going home as in "going home to Malaysia" but then when I am there for a long period, I often also find myself saying, "Oh, I look forward to going home" to the UK. So, I guess I'd categorise myself as hyphenated, and I like it!
>
> E37: I will say it's kind of a mixed identity. Like, my mindset is very Western. But my culture is still very much leaning towards Asian.
>
> UA02: I'm quite well adjusted and have experienced living in western cultures for a long time so I do feel at home both in Malaysia and the UK. There are aspects of both cultures that I embrace as well as stay away from. I suppose I'm a little bit of both.

These participants' narratives express Malaysia and the United Kingdom as "home", which suggests a deep connection to both countries and an inclination to consider both as integral parts of their identity. Their identity categorisation as hyphenated or mixed acknowledges the embracing of being "part Malaysian, part British" (UA03), as stated by another participant, signifying a nuanced understanding of their cultural upbringing, mindset, and sense of belonging which underline the complexities of identity transformation in a multicultural context. Malaysians have already experienced cultural hybridity in their birth country with the amalgamation of their ethnocultural backgrounds, in addition to a blending of Asian and British cultures influenced by colonialism. These forms of "modified cultural traditions" are created to accommodate the new setting in which they live (Brown, 2006: 177). Therefore, it may be easier for these participants to assimilate or integrate due to a sense of familiarity in the process of becoming.

In reference to the data collected, 30% of the participants claimed to have a hyphenated identity, be it British-Malaysian, Malaysian-Global citizen or Scottish-Malaysian. The numerous forms of hyphenated identity could be translated into a "hybrid identity" in the "Third Space", wherein identities are not just defined by "geography or ideology, but by a combination of influences and beliefs" (Khan, 2007: 27), creating a sense of belonging and a new home. Khan believes that:

> Multiculturalism is about respecting difference instead of striving for homogeneity. It should not be about separation or insulating immigrant cultures from British influence, but a celebration of the diversity of the country, with each culture adapting to Britishness in its own way. (2007: 25-26)

Gathering Khan's articulation and participants' narratives, it appears that it is essential to assimilate and integrate into the new country of residence in order to find balance in one's identity, combining one's past and one's future (Hall, 1990). Within the context of immigration, the construction of identity assumes a renewed significance as immigrants strive to make sense of their new environments through the lens of their cultural heritage, which includes the values, beliefs, and practices instilled through their upbringing and socialisation. Put another way, the culture inculcated by immigrants influences how they shape their identities and present themselves amidst the alterations they encounter in their everyday lives. Culture is not fixed but rather undergoes changes as they embark on new journeys and interact with diverse individuals and spaces. Constantly, they discover and redefine their identities within groups, driven by the force of identity itself, as they strive to determine their place within a collective (Huntington, 2004).

The shifting and blending of cultures and identities that become multiple within the diaspora situation emphasises the impact of society on how the participants assimilate and integrate into British culture (Hall, 1996; Huntington 2004). For first-generation Malaysian immigrants, their ethnicity and culture represent their true identity and have primordial bonds rooted in their birth country. Consequently, migrating in the United Kingdom and emigrating from their birth country resulted in a fusion of cultures, giving rise to a unique polycultural Third Space, "reflecting the experience of having more than one source of personal origin or means of self-identification" (Brown, 2006: 179). Diasporas' in-between position, between the host country's language, culture and territory, and the upheld values of the immigrants and homeland has likely shaped their sense of identity and belonging. This diasporic space exists as a site of reconciliation between the contesting elements of the host and home. Home cannot be reclaimed exactly as it was imagined (Anderson, 1983; Bhabha, 1994), suggesting that there is no opportunity to revert back to an initial state. Rather, the diasporic space offers an opportunity to carve out new territories and spaces, instead of rigidly tying one's self-identity and sense of belonging to a specific place of origin. These participants identify themselves with having a hyphenated identity because of the way that they have integrated into British society

and constructed a sense of belonging to it. E37 interpreted her identity experience as being mixed with Asian culture and a Western mindset, in spite of living in the United Kingdom for a long time, aligning with UA02 and his embrace of certain aspects of both cultures (see 5.2.1). There is an in-betweenness that constructs their ethnocultural hybrid identity, which is a mixture of cultures that creates a new identity (Bhabha, 1994; Smith, 2 009). The influential role of cultural hybridity in the construction and transformation of their identities was due to their cultural encounter within British society. Indeed, in the context of globalisation and modernisation, these hybrid spaces blend "local knowledge with global cosmopolitanism" and are now seen as a "benefit" (Smith, 2009: 4). That is to say, in this context, the experiences of Malaysians in the United Kingdom provide a lens through which to explore what is considered British and what might be termed "global" or "cosmopolitan". These hybrid spaces, where local knowledge intersects with global cosmopolitanism, highlight the ever-changing nature of cultural identity in a globalised world. British elements refer to the specific cultural, social, and historical attributes and practices that are characteristic of the United Kingdom, including everything from language, etiquette, and social norms to the broader societal values and historical narratives that shape the collective British identity. For Malaysians in the United Kingdom, engaging with these British elements is a key part of their integration and adaptation process, influencing their identity construction in this new context. On the other hand, "global" or "cosmopolitan" attributes represent a broader, more inclusive set of practices and values that transcend national boundaries, often associated with a sense of global citizenship and cross-cultural exchange. These attributes foster an openness to diverse cultures and perspectives, encouraging individuals to incorporate a variety of global influences into their personal identity.

For Malaysian immigrants, these hybrid spaces offer opportunities to blend their own cultural heritage with both British and cosmopolitan influences, creating a unique, multilayered identity. This blending is seen as a "benefit" in today's interconnected world, as it allows individuals to navigate multiple cultural realms, enhancing their adaptability and cross-cultural understanding. It integrates both local and global aspects that are seen as advantageous due to the broad scope they encompass. The experiences of Malaysian immigrants illustrate the complexity of identity formation in a modern, interconnected world, as they navigate between Malaysian and British cultures, attitudes, and a sense of belonging. This interaction, occurring in what Bhabha terms an "in-between" or "Third Space", shapes their identity and belonging (Bhabha, 1994). In this dynamic space, immigrants draw upon both local and global resources,

reflecting broader shifts in identity construction in a globalised context, where the distinctions between local and global, national and cosmopolitan, are increasingly blurred.

5.3.3. Ethnocultural identity

When migrants settle in a new country, their identities often transform even as they retain strong ties to their homeland, affecting their connections to these places. Rather than merely assimilating into dominant identities, the process of integration typically entails actively re-imagining identities in accordance with local, national, transnational and ethnocultural encounters. This leads to the creation of hybrid ethnocultural identities. In numerous instances, identities have transcended the confines of specific national, ethnic, or racial groups, giving rise to new forms of social interactions. In recent years, diverse groups are uniting based on common interests and shared issues (Cohen *et al*., 2017). Nevertheless, significant disparities persist that continue to marginalise minorities in the United Kingdom, resulting in unequal outcomes among different groups. As explored in Chapter 2.3, despite progress in various sectors, substantial disparities still exist in the United Kingdom that perpetuate the marginalisation of minority groups and lead to unequal outcomes across different communities. These disparities manifest in various dimensions, including education, employment, healthcare, and housing, reflecting systemic inequalities that disadvantage minority populations. In education, for instance, minority students may face unequal access to quality resources, differential treatment, and lower expectations, impacting their academic achievements and future opportunities. In the employment sector, disparities are evident in the form of unequal pay, limited career advancement opportunities, and underrepresentation in leadership roles, which collectively hinder the economic empowerment of minority individuals. Healthcare disparities are another critical area in which minority groups often experience reduced access to quality healthcare services, higher rates of certain health conditions, and less favourable health outcomes. This is compounded by factors such as socioeconomic status, cultural diversity and racism, geographic location, and potential biases within the healthcare system. Housing inequalities also play a significant role, with minority populations more likely to experience poor housing conditions, overcrowding, and housing insecurity, affecting their overall well-being and quality of life. These disparities are not only the result of individual or isolated factors but are rooted in systemic and structural issues that require comprehensive and targeted interventions to address.

Simultaneously, minority groups also confront internal conflicts regarding their construction of identity, sense of belonging and affiliations to both host and home countries. In comparative migration studies, Phillimore *et al.* (2021) found that migrants, despite not being fully assimilated at the local level, manage to weave their daily lives through interactions and

resources available locally. This leads to the formation of complex social and support networks that often transcend national boundaries. They further applied the concept of "bricolage" to delve into the hurdles and limitations immigrants encounter as they grapple with challenges that emerge as they grow older while away from their homeland (2021: 15). This study underscores the resilience and adaptability of immigrants, highlighting how they leverage local resources and encounters to build their lives in new environments, while also emphasising the importance of transnational social and support networks that provide a lifeline for immigrants. Although these findings provide a useful framework for understanding migrant experiences, they may not capture all aspects of these complex journeys.

Malaysians residing in the United Kingdom represent a broad spectrum of identities and ethnicities. While the majority of Malaysian immigrants hold Malaysian citizenship, their ethnic backgrounds are diverse and encompass various ethnic groups. As explored in Chapter 2.2, the question of ethnicity in Malaysia is one that is prevalent. Mahathir states: "Malaysians are more conscious about race than most people" (2008 [1970]: 220). Malaysia is a multiethnic country with three major ethnic groups: Malays, Chinese, and Indians. Each of these groups has its own distinct physiognomy, cultural practices, languages, customs and traditions, and "have practically nothing in common" (Mahathir, 2008 [1970]: 220). Apart from these major ethnic groups, Malaysia is also home to various indigenous groups and other minority communities, including Eurasians, Punjabis, and others. Consequently, these Malaysians sometimes identify themselves according to their ethnocultural backgrounds, religious affiliations, or as Malaysians in a broader sense. During the course of the interviews and the data analysis phase, I observed a discernible pattern regarding integration and assimilation strategies as well as the sense of belonging among different Malaysian ethnic groups, with distinctions between Malays, Chinese, Indians, and those of mixed ethnic backgrounds. My observation revealed that there was a tendency for a lower emigration rate among the Malay ethnic group from Malaysia, resulting in a smaller Malay diaspora. Malays often maintain a strong sense of loyalty to Malaysia, exhibit Malay nationalism, and express intentions of eventually returning to their birth country. Indeed, Malays constitute the largest ethnic group in Malaysia (refer to chapter 2.2), and they are typically of the Islamic faith. The participants in my research residing in the United Kingdom who are of Malay ethnicity, accounting for 13% of the total participants, identified themselves as either Malaysian or Malay Malaysian, or Malaysian Muslim, which reflected their national, ethnocultural, and/or religious affiliations.

There was a sense of pride in their Malay heritage and a desire to maintain a distinct ethnic and national identity even while living abroad.

Malay Malaysians

Religion holds significant importance for some individuals, irrespective of where they reside. It constitutes a fundamental part of their identity and lifestyle, and this applies equally to the participants in my research. My interpretation aligns with a 2005 survey by the Merdeka Centre in Malaysia. In this survey, over 70% of Malay participants prioritised their Muslim faith as the most significant part of their identity, followed by their Malaysian nationality and, lastly, their Malay ethnicity. However, it is important to note that the survey did not consider that, in Malaysia, being Malay inherently implies being a Muslim. In addition to other inquiries, the survey also posed questions about whether Muslims should gain knowledge about other religions in Malaysia. The results showed that more than 80% were open to participating in interfaith dialogues. This indicated a readiness to engage in open discussions about other religions and the differences that bind and/or distinguish them. Building on this context, the personal experiences of these participants, who provide a living testament to these findings will be illustrated. Their narratives offer a window into how individual lives reflect broader cultural and religious dynamics, particularly among the Malay Malaysians in London.

> E07: We have quite a close-knit community in (the) Malay Malaysian community. In so many ways, our children are going back to their roots. There's no question about the Malayness. Being in London makes it easy to retain and maintain our Malay culture. The longer you're away, you try to preserve and value that. The thing about Malaysians abroad is that when you're going home, you believe you're going home to Malaysia. And as you're coming back here, you still feel you're coming home because of the physical home, people, family here today in London.

> E21: I think it's always been very important to me being, not so much my Malay ethnicity, but just being Asian, Malaysian and brown. Being Muslim has always been really important as well. And I think it's a lot easier in London to hold on to those identities because a lot of people are also those things. There's so many other BAMEs and it's normal.

Both narratives highlight the significance of cultural identity, community, and the ability to maintain and express one's ethnic and religious background while living in London. E07 emphasised the strong connection to her Malay roots and the preservation of that culture within the "close-knit community among Malay Malaysians" in London which is a facilitating factor in retaining and maintaining her Malay identity. The way she specified "[b]eing in London makes it easy to retain and maintain our Malay culture", alludes to several factors. These include London's "super-diversity", and its multicultural and multinational nature (Vertovec, 2007: 1025), as well as the presence of an established Malay Malaysian community there, which collectively facilitate the preservation of that culture. This is likely a way to consciously make efforts to distinguish themselves from members of the majority group and an attempt at establishing "a lasting diaspora" (Weiner & Richards, 20119; Brown, 2006: 172). This strong connection is amplified by the fact that she has a family in both countries and thus seems to connote a sense of belonging to both places.

Of similar mindset, E21 found it easier to hold onto her "Asian, Malaysian, brown and Muslim" identities in London due to the diverse population: "so many other BAMEs and it's normal"—which makes her feel comfortable embracing those multiple identities (refer to section 5.2.2 on BAME). In contrast, E21 does not focus on her Malay ethnicity as much as E07, rather she focuses on a broader ethnic and cultural background. I suspect there may be several reasons. E21 may want to reflect her multiple identity aspects, encompassing a more comprehensive representation of her background and experiences in the wider diversity and inclusivity of London's multicultural environment, where there is better connection and relatability to others who also identify as "Asian, Malaysian, or brown"—irrespective of her specific ethnicities—which may be more desirable. Another possible explanation might lie in the fact that E07 has founded a large family comprising immediate and extended relatives in London, which might enforce her groundedness in "Malayness" and its exclusivity in the Malay community. In comparison, E21 does not have a family and may want to be included in the wider multicultural society.

For some Malay Malaysians, religion constitutes a big part of their identity and plays a central role in shaping their lives that often permeates various aspects of their daily routines, social interactions, and cultural practices.

> E57: I try to blend in as much as I can but in the house, I bring Malaysia into my family, the cultures, religion as well. I'm very open into the religious bit,

> it's my belief and my children can choose whatever religion they want. We are Muslims. But in the end, we treat our family with openness. So, in terms of culture and religion, I give them the freedom to choose. If given the opportunity, we will consider retiring back home.
>
> E67: Here it's mainly just acquaintances, football at the weekend and so lacking closeness. So, in that sense I don't call England home. We train our daughter as a Muslim. And our decision to go home is amplified because I'm married to another Malaysian, so the option of going home is stronger.

While both narratives acknowledge Islam as their faith and emphasise its transmission to their children, there is a divergence in their approaches towards religious freedom and cultural openness. E57 places a significant value on embracing diverse cultures and religions, granting their children the autonomy to select their own religious paths, even if they continue to identify as Muslims. He prioritises openness and freedom of choice, reflecting a broader acceptance of religious diversity within the family. Conversely, E67 does not explicitly mention providing their daughter with the freedom to choose a faith different from Islam. He stated that their daughter is being "train[ed] as a Muslim", suggesting a more structured religious upbringing. This suggests a stronger emphasis on adhering to Islamic traditions and preserving the religious identity within the family. Aligning with this narrative, Modood (2011) observed that the majority of Muslims in the United Kingdom consistently maintain a strong sense of identification with their Muslim identity. However, both narratives exhibit a strong affiliation to religion, which serves as a fundamental element of personal identity. Regardless of the differences in their approaches to religious freedom, they expressed a primordial connection to Malaysia and a commitment to preserving their cultural and religious heritage. Their association with Malaysia indicates a profound attachment to their homeland and a longing to eventually return.

While there are disparities in their attitudes towards religious freedom, both narratives underscore the significance of cultural and religious tradition and the establishment of "a sacred space" (Brown, 2006: 173). They demonstrate a strong bond and firm identification with Malaysia and a desire to maintain these identities, and a longing for its continuous embrace in the present as in the future. Unlike E07 and E21, who have either familial or communal bonds, or both, in London—which makes it easier for them to establish a sense of belonging—E57 and E67 have intentions of returning to Malaysia due to the lack of such bonds and a sense of

"closeness". These bonds provide a support system and a familiar cultural context that can significantly ease the process of settling in a new place. The absence of these bonds and a sense of "closeness" or familiarity with the community in London may make their experience in the city more challenging. This leads to feelings of isolation or alienation, prompting their wish to return to their home country, as evidenced by E57 and E67. The desire to return appears as a compelling obligation as they may see no other place as their own. According to Mahathir (2008 [1970]), Malay Malaysians feel a strong need to return to their birth country as if forced to leave Malaysia. An Indian Malaysian could move to India and fit in, just as a Chinese Malaysian could move to China. However, a Malay would not have this option if exiled and would not be readily accepted anywhere else due to ethnic ties—not even in Indonesia—as explained further by Mahathir.

E57 and E67's yearning to return can be understood as an emotional response to the challenges of adapting to a new environment, where the migrant perceives their home country as the only place where they truly belong or feel understood. Such feelings can intensify when they compare their current circumstances with the familiarity and comfort of their homeland. Exploring the gender dimension of this phenomenon reveals additional layers of complexity. It is worth considering whether there are distinct differences in how men and women experience this desire to return, potentially influenced by cultural expectations, social roles, or personal responsibilities. For example, in the context of Malaysian immigrants in the United Kingdom, the impulse to nurture children within a familiar cultural and religious milieu is notably evident, particularly among women who often assume primary roles in caregiving and in the preservation and transmission of cultural traditions. Interestingly, my research indicates that both men and women exhibit a comparable sense of duty or inclination to return to Malaysia, driven by a desire to ensure their offspring are immersed in the cultural and religious heritage familiar to them. This is especially pertinent for Malaysian Muslim families in the United Kingdom, who may seek to raise their children in a predominantly Islamic setting—a goal they perceive as more feasible in Malaysia. Beyond the previously discussed factors, this inclination emphasises a profound connection to their Malaysian roots and illuminates the distinct challenges confronted by the Malay community in navigating their dual identities.

Some participants offered a different perspective on how their migration to the United Kingdom has influenced their understanding and differentiation between Islam and Malay culture.

> S07: I see my religion Islam in a more holistic way and separate it from the Malay culture (often the two are so intertwined that people are not sure what is Malay and what is Muslim). But I will probably want to go back to Malaysia after a few years.
>
> S03: I feel more secure about my ethnicity and religion now, to be honest. I did not like the entitlement of Malay Muslims in Malaysia and am happy now that I get to be just a Muslim. I think learning about Islam from a non-Malay perspective has helped me understand Islam better.

By separating Islam and Malay ethnicity, S07 suggests that people often conflate Malay customs and Islamic practices, leading to confusion about what constitutes Malay culture and what represents Islamic principles. This aspect can indeed be confusing—particularly when the Malaysian constitution states that "all Malays are also legally Muslims" (Martin, 2012 :33). Therefore, by definition, a Malay must "profess the Islamic faith" (Mahathir, 2008 [1970]: 172) which means "one cannot be a 'Malay' without also being a Muslim" (Ratnam, 2019: 33). The definition of what constitutes a Malay and "the acquisition of Malay citizenship" is "confined to Indonesians, Arabs and Indian Muslims" who profess to the Islamic faith and thus conform to Malay characteristics (Mahathir, 2008 [1970]: 172). Acknowledging that the process of constructing the Malay-Muslim identity began in the 19th century, the relationship between the two has consistently been marked by tension (Martin, 2012). Despite this distinction and tension, S07 mentioned the intention of returning to Malaysia after a few years, signalling a desire to reconnect with her birth country. This suggests that while S07 may perceive a difference between Islam and Malay culture, she still maintains a connection to Malaysia and potentially values certain cultural elements. S03 expressed her dissatisfaction with the entitlement of Malay Muslims in Malaysia but, after having emigrated from Malaysia and gained an external outlook on these elements, she is now able to appreciate the opportunity to identify solely as a Muslim without the additional layers of ethnic or cultural entitlement. The impact of learning about Islam from a non-Malay perspective has provided both S07 and S03 with a better understanding of the religion, owing to exposure to different perspectives and interpretations. It appears to have broadened their understanding of Islam beyond the confines of a single cultural lens.

The significance of their faith may reflect a strong sense of religious identity and practice within the Malay community, foster a sense of belonging and solidarity with other Malaysian

Muslims in Britain, and maintain connections to their cultural roots while adapting to a new cultural context. There is an overwhelming majority of Pakistanis and Bangladeshis who are Muslims in the United Kingdom (Modood *et al.*, 1997). This suggests that the Muslim community in Britain is diverse, comprising individuals from various ethnic backgrounds, including Malaysians, Indians, Pakistanis, Bangladeshis and more. The shared faith among these different ethnic groups may further foster a sense of unity and solidarity within the broader Muslim community in the United Kingdom. This raises an intriguing question: might the shared religious identity within the diverse Muslim community in the United Kingdom overshadow or reinforce ethnic or national identities, such as the Malay identity, among its members? My findings reveal a homogeneous pattern among the participants regarding Malay and Muslim identities. The variation in how individuals prioritise their Malay and Muslim identities is highly subjective, reflecting complex cultural, religious, and personal factors. For some, the Malay identity may take precedence due to a profound connection to their cultural heritage and the traditions, and practices that have been ingrained since childhood, making it the core of their self-identity, with religion playing a secondary, albeit important, role. Conversely, those who place their Muslim identity above their Malay identity might do so because of the universal and unifying nature of Islam, which transcends national and ethnic boundaries and offers a broader sense of belonging and community. For these individuals, religion might serve as the primary source of guidance and identity, overshadowing ethnic background. Meanwhile, individuals who view these identities as equally important typically experience a subjective dual sense of belonging, where both their cultural heritage and religious faith are intricately intertwined, each playing a vital role in shaping their self-concept and worldview. This subjective variation signifies the nuanced and individualised ways in which identity is constructed and experienced within the diaspora, influenced by a confluence of personal experiences, community dynamics, and the broader sociopolitical landscape in the United Kingdom.

A recent observation I made pertains to the Malays residing in Cape Malay, Cape Town, South Africa. Nico Kotze's research in *A community in trouble? The impact of gentrification on the Bo-Kaap, Cape Town* regarding the Malay identity in Cape Town, South Africa offers a compelling parallel to the discussions around Malay and Muslim identities among Malaysian immigrants.

> [T]he puzzle of creating the so-called "Malay" identity was when Islam was introduced to the Cape with the labourers from the Moluccas and political

> prisoners from Indonesia. However, the religion only really took root in the early 1800s, when Indian Muslim slaves from Bengal, the Malabar Coast and the interior of India were brought to the Cape. The term "Malay" was used during the nineteenth century to refer to the coloured Muslim population of all origins (Todesini & Japha, 2003). This became a self-descriptive term during the first half of the twentieth century, especially during the Apartheid Era, when many Afrikaans-speaking Muslims took on the name in the hope that they would be accepted by the white elite because any form of association with black identity could lead to disadvantage in the context of oppression and racism within the country (Jeppe, 1986). (2013: 128)

This historical evolution of the "Malay" identity in South Africa illustrates how identities are not only shaped by cultural and religious factors but are also deeply influenced by sociopolitical contexts. The strategic adoption of the Malay identity in Cape Town was a response to the racial and political dynamics of the time, highlighting how identity can serve as a tool for navigating social structures and power relations. Comparing this with the situation of Malaysian immigrants in the United Kingdom, while the contexts are distinct, there are underlying themes of identity negotiation and adaptation. Just as Cape Malays adapted their identity in response to local conditions, Malaysian immigrants in the United Kingdom navigate their Malay and Muslim identities within a different set of sociocultural and political dynamics. In both cases, religion, culture, and sociopolitical factors play a crucial role in shaping how identities are constructed, perceived, and lived. These observations give prominence to the fluidity and complexity of identity, which is constantly being redefined by individuals and communities in response to their changing circumstances. Whether in Cape Town or the United Kingdom, the way people engage with and prioritise aspects of their identity reflects their broader historical, cultural, and social contexts.

Chinese Malaysians

The participants in my research who are of Chinese ethnicity express gratitude for the opportunities available to them in the United Kingdom, recognising the benefits of education, career advancement, and personal growth that this country offers. However, underlying this appreciation, there exists a profound sense of loyalty among Chinese Malaysians towards their birth country. Despite the allure of opportunities abroad, many Chinese Malaysians have plans to eventually return to Malaysia, driven by a deep connection to their cultural roots and a strong

desire to contribute to the development and progress of their birth country. The Chinese ethnic group in Malaysia constitutes a significant portion of the population (refer to chapter 2.2), and represents 47% of the total researched participants, characterised by its diverse religious and cultural practices. Chinese Malaysians follow various religious traditions, such as Buddhism, Taoism, Confucianism and Christianity, which greatly influence their way of life and shape their cultural identity (Hooker, 2003). The observance of these religions not only provides a spiritual foundation for individuals but also enriches the cultural practices and beliefs within the Chinese Malaysian community, playing a significant role in shaping the values and traditions of this group.

In terms of identity, the Chinese Malaysian participants exhibit a wide range of self-identifications. Some choose to identify themselves as Chinese Malaysian, emphasising their cultural heritage and ethnic background. This identification acknowledges their Chinese roots while also recognising their status as Malaysians, highlighting their integration into the wider Malaysian society. On the other hand, some individuals prefer to identify solely as Malaysians, emphasising their sense of belonging and loyalty to the country as a whole. This identification underscores the Chinese Malaysian community's commitment to national unity and their active participation in building a harmonious multicultural society. Additionally, there are those who opt for a simpler identification as Chinese, focusing primarily on their cultural affiliation without specifically denoting their nationality. This flexible self-identification reflects the diverse perspectives and nuanced identities within the Chinese Malaysian community. The experiences and perceptions of these participants in relation to their identity as Chinese Malaysians within a multicultural society are provided through the excerpts which highlight the complexities and challenges faced in constructing and asserting a distinct Malaysian identity.

> E19: Do I think of myself as British? Do I think of myself as Malaysian? Or do I think of myself as Malaysian Chinese? Those are questions that spring to mind. But it's a lot easier here because of the melting pot of society. I will take that question as an opportunity to then explain and talk about myself and tell them I'm actually originally Malaysian. And then there'll be that question, "Are you Malay?" Then explain that I'm actually Malaysian Chinese. And it adds to the confusion when they see my wife who's darker skin but not Malay. She's Malaysian Sri Lankan whose mum is Irish. It

> becomes the topic that sort of helps you get to know everybody else, to a certain extent.
>
> E69: I still very much identify myself as Malaysian. In fact, the latest census that we just did, I put myself down as Chinese Malaysian. I could have just put in Chinese on the census, but I've actually gone and put down as other.
>
> E12: I'm Malaysian Chinese. A lot of people here don't recognise that you are Malaysian, they think you're Chinese. I think that is the biggest issue with my identity. No one will look at me as a Malaysian. No one have said we are Malaysian because there's no such thing as a Malaysian identity. We can't look at a person and say, "Hey, this is how Malaysians look". We don't have that.

The topic of identity becomes a means of initiating conversations and understanding among friends of E19, who also noted that the multicultural nature of society makes it easier to navigate and explain questions or inquiries about his Chinese Malaysian identity, or of the confusion that arises about his wife's mixed heritage. E69 deliberately chose to identify herself as a Chinese Malaysian rather than simply Chinese, desiring to emphasise her Malaysian identity within the broader Chinese ethnic group. By selecting "other", she challenges the singular notion of identity and contributes to a more nuanced and complementary understanding of an ethnocultural identity. Indeed, in earlier British censuses, ethnic categorisation was limited and did not encompass a comprehensive list. Since 1991, additional questions about one's ethnic group have been incorporated into the census, providing participants with the opportunity to choose their exact ethnicity within the 287 ethnic groups enlisted in the 2021 Census (ONS). The ONS have also noted that the most significant increases were observed in the number of individuals who identified their ethnic group as "Asian, Asian British or Asian Welsh" (rising from 4.2 million people in 2011 to 5.5 million people in 2021) and those who identified as part of the "Other ethnic group" (increasing from 564,000 people in 2011 to 1.3 million people in 2021). Under the "Other ethnic group" category, the highest write-in response option comprised Sikh, Hispanic or Latin American, and Kurdish (ONS, 2021). A multitude of factors could be influencing the evolving ethnic makeup of the United Kingdom, including ageing, fertility, mortality, and migration. Additionally, changes in how individuals choose to self-identify on the census over time could also be contributing to these shifts. An example provided in the 2021 Census showed that the Sikh community chose to

describe their ethnicity as Sikh as well as their religious affiliation. These variables suggest the multiple categories individuals use to represent themselves, coinciding with how the participants in this research have chosen to respond in such censuses for better representation. The lack of recognition as a Malaysian and their ethnocultural identities has frustrated Malaysians like E12, who are often regarded as Chinese, and their Malaysian nationality is disregarded and unacknowledged. E12's "biggest issue with […] identity" is the underrepresentation and misconception of what constitutes a Malaysian. The absence of a clear identity suggests two main issues:

1. The lack of factual knowledge of this population needs to be remedied.
2. There is no fixed stereotype or appearance associated with being Malaysian, emphasising the diversity and complexity of the Malaysian population, which challenges simplistic notions of identity and societal perceptions.

The following excerpts provide insights into the participants' lived experiences and how they identify themselves in terms of ethnicity, heritage and traditions.

> E22: I'm predominantly Chinese. I've got native blood on my mother's side, which I hold quite precious. So, if there's any forms to fill out, I would always write Chinese or mixed Asian to categorise myself in a very large ethnic group. I would say it does define me because of the celebrations and festivals. And it's very much a part of who I am.
>
> E60: Still feel Malaysian, Chinese Malaysian. I think more Chinese as my ethnicity is very much determined by my Chinese culture.
>
> E61: I would identify as Chinese and Buddhist. I guess it's definitely a very defining part of me. On the one hand, because race, ethnicity and religion are not exactly very insignificant topics in Malaysia. Especially my ethnicity, I guess it's been a very salient category in defining who I am. Now, on the other hand, I think… I assume as with many Chinese in Malaysia, we will still practice a lot of traditions in terms of celebrating Chinese New Year and speaking Chinese dialects. So, I would definitely say being Chinese is a very defining part of who I am as opposed to being Buddhist.
>
> E52: I guess you can say that I'm very Chinese. My mentality about money and values are very Chinese. Although it's a bit diluted now, with my

> husband not being the way I am. I adapt very easily and attempt to change my way if it makes it easier. I get influenced basically quite easily. So, it's diluted a little bit, but I think I'm still quite Chinese.

E22, E60, E61, and E52 demonstrated having a strong sense of their Chinese heritage and identified with it in various ways, such as participating in cultural traditions, considering it defining to their identity, or associating certain values and mentalities of being "very Chinese" with their Chinese attributes. Additionally, the Malaysian context plays a role in shaping their perspectives, as ethnicity holds significance in the country's social fabric and, in turn, has become an integral part of their identity. Some participants seem to give priority to their Chinese identity more than other aspects. This preference might be influenced by a desire to be categorised within a larger ethnic group, as stated by E22. Another possible reason could be the tendency in Malaysia to identify people based on their ethnic appearance rather than recognising them solely as Malaysians (refer to section 3.3.1). In my view, this phenomenon could have potentially impelled non-Malay Malaysians living abroad to distance themselves from national identification and gravitate towards a more primordial one, such as ethnocultural identity, favouring a broader collective ethnocultural identity. This misperception or misclassification within a diverse society might lead them to accept the perceived categorisation rather than having to repeatedly explain their identity and background to others.

According to the 2001 Census, the Chinese population in the United Kingdom was recorded as 247,403. However, estimates from the UK Home Office suggest that this number could be as high as 500,000 in 2008, with the majority of the population concentrated in London. Much research has been done by researchers on this diaspora, pointing out that the Chinese diaspora is a diverse group with individuals hailing from various regions such as mainland China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Singapore, Vietnam, Malaysia, and even the West Indies. Moreover, a growing number of Chinese individuals were born in the United Kingdom. They each have unique stories that encompass their background, experiences in the host country, interactions with the local community, and reception by the host community. While it is important to note that this community is not homogeneous and is constantly evolving with new arrivals, aging of the older generation, and birth of new generations, the reasons for their migration, their educational backgrounds, and the times of their arrival vary greatly (Sacu Admin, 2019). Due to the large Chinese community in the United Kingdom, many Chinese Malaysians categorise themselves as "Chinese or mixed Asian" in order to be part of "a very large ethnic group" (E22), echoing "the concept of a community of citizens and a community

of communities" (Parekh, 2000: 47). This sizable community adds a dimension to their identity and provides an avenue to observe cultural traditions and celebrate festivals as a way to belong to a larger ethnic community.

Indian Malaysians

The Indian ethnic group in Malaysia consists of people from south India and Sri Lanka of Tamil origins, as well as various other Indian ethnic groups. This group constitutes slightly more than 7% of the total population in Malaysia (refer to chapter 2.2), and 23% of the total researched participants. They follow different religions such as Hinduism, Islam, Christianity, and Sikhism. Malaysian participants identified themselves as Malaysian Indian, Indian Malaysian, Malaysians, or simply as Indian.

> Some Malaysian Indians are Christians or Muslims but the majority are Hindus or Sikhs. (Hooker, 2003: 27)

The participants who fall under the Indian Malaysian category have expressed gratitude for better prospects for education, career advancement, and overall quality of life, resulting in a degree of loyalty to the United Kingdom. Many have also expressed their intentions of remaining permanently in the new residence instead of returning to Malaysia. An important observation that I was able to make during data analysis was the fact that there seems to be a higher tendency to apply for and acquire British citizenship within this ethnic group. This piece of information suggests that the Indian ethnic group in Malaysia has a strong inclination towards obtaining British citizenship, highlighting the importance they place on securing their future in the new country of residence.

> E70: I say that I'm Malaysian Indian because, first of all, my father is from India. He moved to Malaysia. Then I moved to the UK. That's what I normally say to all my friends.

> S01: In terms of culture, I've kind of like assimilated a bit in my adopted country. But I would say culture wise as well I'm still quite Malaysian and quite Indian as well. Malaysian Indian specifically. I was born and brought up there. So, my identity is more Malaysian. And then people ask, "Well, you don't really look Malaysian, you kind of look Indian". Then I have to explain that Malaysia is quite a multiracial and multicultural country, but that I feel quite proud of my Indian heritage. So, because my parents are from India, I

> still got strong ties with the motherland. My extended family is all there, and my parents made it a point to bring us back to India, especially South India, Tamil Nadu and Kerala to visit family. People here do ask because they are curious, then I try to speak about that aspect of my identity.

Both excerpts demonstrate the intricate process of identity formation, highlighting the significance of their Indian ancestral heritage and its impact on their self-identification. In both cases, a profound sense of pride in their Indian roots is evident, as they strive to maintain a connection with the "motherland" and extended family despite residing abroad. This serves as a means to preserve cultural bonds and uphold their cultural heritage. Moreover, these participants actively engage in discussions about their identity with friends, indicating their eagerness to promote a better understanding of their identity and to dispel any misconceptions about their multicultural background within their social circle in the United Kingdom. Pointing out to S01 that "you don't really look Malaysian, you kind of look Indian" (*sic*), again, suggests the lack of knowledge about the diversity of this community and the urgency to educate people about his background. By embracing their current cultural context while simultaneously cherishing their Indian heritage, they seek to foster a harmonious blend of diverse identities. Furthermore, S01 offers a nuanced perspective on identity, describing the process of assimilating into the "adopted country" while retaining a strong sense of being both Malaysian and Indian. This demonstrates how his identity has been shaped by the cultural assimilation he has experienced and the influence of his Indian and Malaysian roots, giving rise to an ethnocultural identity. This complex nature of belonging to "several worlds" (Brown, 2006: 175): Malaysian, Indian, and British identities, influenced by familial ties, cultural assimilation, and the desire to maintain a connection with one's heritage, is effectively portrayed in these excerpts.

While some of the participants have explicitly identified themselves as Indian Malaysians, others have referred to themselves solely as Indian or Indian Muslim.

> E31: I like to say that I'm just Indian. I don't refer to myself as Malaysian anymore. I go by my race. I don't even identify by nationality. In fact, I don't feel so attached to Malaysia anymore. I have nothing left there now. I'm comfortable here, we get everything here so why do I want to go back to Malaysia? So that's prompting me now to go and apply for British citizenship.

> E26: I think sometimes we are kind of lost because I'm an Indian Muslim and most of my friends are not. In a way I do feel lost because I don't go to the mosque like where you can meet common friends. I feel like not all Muslims are very open minded. Not everybody can be just like me… most of them can be very judgmental. On the other hand, Hindus don't care. So, I feel like my identity as a Malaysian is kind of going because I'm more mixing with Indians. So, I feel like my Malaysian identity, my real identity, is kind of slipping away.

The excerpts above reflect two contrasting perspectives on identity and cultural attachment among Indian Malaysians living in the United Kingdom. E31's decision to prioritise her ethnic identity over nationality can be attributed to a lack of personal and emotional attachment to Malaysia, while E26's identification struggles stem from a sense of alienation within the like-minded religious community. These perspectives also illustrate the diverse experiences within the Indian Malaysian community in the United Kingdom. While some of them may feel a stronger connection to their ethnic background, others may face challenges in finding a sense of belonging within their own religious or cultural communities. These statements reflect the evolving nature of identity and the impact of personal experiences, cultural contexts, and individual preferences on how individuals perceive and define themselves, resulting in their Malaysian identity "slipping away". The length of their long-distance migration plays a part in the "slipping away" of their identity. In the case of E31, who has lived in the United Kingdom for 42 years, she has lost her Malaysian identity as she has put down social roots and grown older in her not-so-new home. And for E26, who experiences a complex interplay of cultural, religious, and national identities as an Indian Malaysian Muslim, she has also expressed a feeling of being judged by some within the Muslim community, which can be challenging. On the other hand, she has found acceptance among her Hindu friends who seem to be more open-minded. Simultaneously, she grapples with a shifting sense of national identity as she spends more time with Indians, resulting in the fading of her Malaysian identity.

The adherence to the Indian community is possible for E26 owing to the long-established Indian diaspora in the United Kingdom. As previous discussed, this diaspora is the largest ethnic minority population in the United Kingdom today. The significant influx of immigrants from the Indian subcontinent has greatly enriched Britain's ethnic diversity, including large numbers of Indians, Pakistanis, and Bangladeshis (Shankley *et al*., 2020: 17). Their migration journey was largely due to Britain's colonial ties with the region and the demand for manual

labour during the 1950s and 1960s, particularly in towns across northern England (Shankley *et al*., 2020: 17). Similar to the Jamaican diaspora in the United Kingdom, the Indian community now also spans three generations. In the 1940s, high unemployment in the Caribbean and employment opportunities in Britain led to a significant migration wave to British shores, particularly to London and other major cities (Hall, 2018; Shankley *et al*., 2020: 17). This migration was enabled through transatlantic voyages on vessels such as the SS Empire Windrush, coupled with the migrants' status as British subjects, significantly influencing the formation of the Black Caribbean community in the United Kingdom (Hall, 2018; Shankley *et al*., 2020: 17). Research on the Indian diaspora has concluded that this diaspora has been instrumental in shaping various facets of British society while maintaining strong ties with their Indian heritage. Given the presence of multiple generations of Indians who are descendants of Punjabi, Gujarati, Bengali, Malayali, Tamil, Telugu, Konkani, and Marathi communities, and have a strong influence on British life today, it comes as no surprise that E26 is "mixing more with Indians". This association aids in fostering a sense of belonging which inevitably leads to a shift in her self-identification.

Mixed-ethnic Malaysians

Mixed-ethnic Malaysians refer to those in Malaysia who have a heritage that includes a diverse combination of ethnic backgrounds, such as Malay-Chinese, Malay-Indian, Chinese-Indian, Eurasians or a combination of two or more ethnicities. This group accounts for less than 1% of the total population in Malaysia (refer to chapter 2.2) and 10% of the total researched participants. This group often has unique cultural experiences and embraces aspects of multiple cultures and exposure to different traditions and religions, multiple languages, customs and diverse cuisines. David discusses her qualitative interview findings on "'mixed' Malaysians" and how they "appear rooted in 'history', 'blood' and primordial notions" of their identities (2012: 28). Consequently, the concept of mixed-ethnicity in Malaysia reflects the multicultural and multiethnic nature of the country where exogamous marriages are increasingly common. Therefore, it is commonplace to find Malaysians who have a mix of different ethnicities in their family background, reflecting the historical and ongoing interactions between different communities in Malaysia.

> E73: I'm proud to be a Japanese-Chinese ethnic who grew up in Malaysia. I take every opportunity to share my cultures and "impress" others with my language skills.

> E10: I was born in a family where my mom was a Malay and my dad was an Indian converted to Muslim. And our first language was English. And because of our mixed parentage, I have what we call one Malaysian family.
>
> E64: I was born in Malaysia. My parents were born in Malaysia. My father is half English, half Chinese. My mom's parents were from Thailand, but they were both born in Malaysia. So, they're first-generation Malaysian. My grandmother was born in Malaysia. So, effectively I'm third-generation born Malaysian.

The above excerpts collectively illustrate the richness of their cultural identities, which showcase diverse ethnic backgrounds ranging from Japanese-Chinese and mixed Malay-Indian to Chinese-Thai-English heritage. The experiences shared highlight the various factors that have come to shape their identity, including family dynamics, language, and generational ties to the country. E73 identifies as a Japanese-Chinese Malaysian and actively shares her cultures with others, particularly through language skills. It is perhaps her way of embracing and celebrating her multicultural heritage. E10's narrative highlights English as her first language and emphasise her family's fusion of Indian, Malay, and Muslim influences, even describing her family as "one Malaysian family", which reflects her perspective on being a product of diverse backgrounds within the Malaysian context. Similarly, E64 shares a multi-generational perspective on being Malaysian with mixed heritage of English, Chinese and Thai, positioning himself as a third-generation Malaysian. What is understood by these narratives is that they reflect a sense of pride and a desire to communicate and preserve their cultural heritage. Whether through sharing language skills, celebrating multiculturalism, or tracing familial roots, these participants embrace and assert their unique identities within the multicultural fabric of Malaysian society.

What must be noted is the fact that the ethnic categorisation in Malaysia maintains "rigid boundaries of officialised ethnic identity, as a result, alternative identities are either neglected, supressed or subsumed under the 'Dan lain-lain' (Other) category" (David, 2012: 27). This means that many in this group face identity issues and often have to select a rigid identification that does not acknowledge their true, multiple identity. Moving to the United Kingdom has presented them with the opportunity to blend in with "the melting pot of society" and have friends from "Australia, Ukraine, Spain [and] Portugal" (E19). Similar to a chameleon (Coulmas, 2019), adapting to different situations as a result of having a Malaysian background,

"it easier for us to adapt to different people and different culture and different religion" (*sic*) in order to foster a sense of belonging in a broader ethnocultural spectrum of British society.

Malaysians

In the United Kingdom, it is not uncommon to find Malaysians who prefer to identify themselves solely as Malaysians without emphasising a specific ethnic background. Neera Kapur-Dromson, the author of *From Jhelum to Tana* who wrote about the generations of the Indian community in Kenya, suggests that "just the term Kenyans should be sufficient" (2007: 407). This reflects the approach of more than half of the total participants who identify themselves only as Malaysians. This choice is often driven by various factors, including personal beliefs, cultural integration, and a desire to promote a sense of unity and inclusivity among Malaysians living abroad. One of the reasons why some Malaysians in the United Kingdom prefer a Malaysian identity is to embrace a broader national identity that transcends ethnic divisions, a divide that continues to prevail in contemporary Malaysia. By emphasising their Malaysian nationality, they aim to promote a sense of unity and commonality among Malaysians from different ethnic backgrounds. This approach helps to foster stronger bonds within the Malaysian community and encourages cooperation and understanding, which may otherwise be unachievable to some extent in their country of origin. Moreover, identifying solely as Malaysians also reflects their desire to integrate into the multicultural fabric of British society. By downplaying ethnic backgrounds, Malaysians can focus on shared experiences and values, enabling them to connect with people from various cultural backgrounds on a larger spectrum more easily.

> E28: I'm quite neutral here. Back home there's all sorts of connotations and baggage of being a Malay. Over here, not so much because… who cares, right? You're Malaysian and you're good at what you do. That's what I've experienced here. It's not so much who you are but what you can do.

> E18: I feel Malaysian. I don't always sell Malaysia, but that identity is always in me. I find it easier to be Malaysian here than in Malaysia. When I was growing up, I was English educated and couldn't speak Chinese. So, I never felt accepted by my classmates. I've always been in fringes and margins as a Malaysian there.

> E42: I'm Malaysian before I am Indian, and Malaysian before I am British.

The three excerpts demonstrate how national and ethnic identities are perceived differently depending on their experiences and the environments they find themselves in. E28 and E18 have both expressed their ease in embracing their Malaysian identity while living outside of Malaysia compared to when they were in their birth country. This sentiment may be linked to living abroad for an extended amount of time where nostalgia and primordial bonds set in, instigating a need to hold on to that bond. E28 expressed a sense of neutrality regarding her Malay identity and values meritocracy based on the importance of skills and abilities rather than solely focusing on ethnic identity in the United Kingdom. Furthermore, E18's experience of being English educated and not being able to speak Chinese has led to exclusion by classmates and feeling marginalised in Malaysia. This experience might have been the reason why E18 identified as Malaysian rather than Chinese Malaysian as she may lack a sense of loyalty and patriotism to the Chinese Malaysian community. E42 firmly stated that she identifies as Malaysian before anything else, indicating a strong sense of national identity which appears fundamental to her self-perception.

In addition, choosing a Malaysian identity over a specific ethnic background is a way for some participants to distance themselves from potential stereotypes or biases associated with a particular ethnic group. By presenting themselves as Malaysians first and foremost, they can challenge preconceived notions and encourage others to see them as individuals rather than representatives of a particular ethnic community. It is important to note that the preference for a Malaysian identity does not diminish the significance of one's ethnic heritage or cultural roots. As demonstrated thus far, many Malaysians in the United Kingdom still maintain a strong connection with their ethnic traditions, customs, and languages. Nonetheless, they choose to emphasise solely their national identity without stressing a specific ethnic background as a way to bridge polarity, foster inclusivity, embrace multiculturalism, and promote a sense of unity among fellow Malaysians in their host country. The variation in ethnocultural identity among Malaysians in the United Kingdom reflects the multicultural nature of Malaysia as a whole. This diversity enriches the Malaysian community abroad, providing a broader perspective and a unique blend of cultures. It fosters a sense of pride in their shared nationality while celebrating the distinct backgrounds that shape this often underrepresented yet vibrant community.

This section has highlighted the various Malaysian ethnic groups' quest for a sense of identity in the United Kingdom. Drawing from these findings, I argue that their integration, identity construction, and sense of belonging can largely be traced back to their ethnocultural heritage. As mentioned earlier, Mahathir (2008 [1970]) hypothesises that the three main ethnic

groups have almost nothing in common in terms of physiognomy, language, culture and religion, highlighting, on the one hand, that diversity is a source of richness but, on the other hand, that it also leads to significant differences. This holds true insomuch as the diverse groups examined in this study exhibit varying methods of self-identification, stemming from their relation and identities *vis-a-vis* Malaysia, and how these approaches have influenced their process of identity development in the United Kingdom. Malay Malaysians have a strong sense of duty to return to their homeland. This could be rooted in cultural or personal reasons, as well as a desire to maintain connections with their heritage and families. Returning to one's homeland is often seen as a way to reconnect with one's roots and contribute to the development of one's birth country. I have also argued that the motivation to return to one's homeland may arise from not having a national sense of belonging in any other country, leaving them with little choice but to consider returning to Malaysia. For Chinese and Indian Malaysians, they have shared varied degrees of identification—some maintaining their ethnic identity and others prioritising their religious identity. In one respect, Chinese Malaysians exhibit a strong desire to return to Malaysia, primarily driven by factors like family reunification, the aspiration to participate actively in the country's politics and economic progression, and considering retirement as part of a lifestyle migration plan. In another respect, Indian Malaysians display a distinct lack of desire to return to Malaysia, to the extent that they may disregard their Malaysian identity and primarily identify themselves as Indians after migration. Although the mixed-ethnic Malaysians appear to have a fluid and adaptable identity pre- and post-migration, their desire to return to Malaysia is unclear.

Despite the differences mentioned, there exists a prevailing sense of unity and kinship among Malaysians when in a foreign land, with Malaysia serving as a constant "point of reference" in various aspects of their lives (Brown, 2006: 179). When Malaysians are living abroad, they may find common ground in their shared experiences as immigrants. These shared experiences can lead to a sense of solidarity and kinship among the Malaysian community, as they face similar opportunities and challenges in their new environment. These findings furnish constructive comprehension of the sophisticated nature of identity, belonging, and unity within the Malaysian diaspora. As a survival strategy (refer to section 3.4), Malaysians living abroad may experience reduced ethnopolitical tensions and an increase in shared common experiences in the diasporic transnational space. Additionally, they underscore the significance of their ethnocultural identity in shaping their recognition and integration within the wider ethnocultural groups in British society.

5.3.4. Becoming British: Citizenship and identity

Based on the data in Figure 21, it can be observed that 10% of the participants expressed a stronger sense of British identity compared to their Malaysian identity, particularly when they had spent a significant amount of time in the United Kingdom. Furthermore, several participants had taken steps to obtain British citizenship, further reinforcing their connection to British society. The findings from the participants' narratives highlight that these participants feel more British than Malaysian, suggesting a deep sense of attachment to British culture, values, and way of life. This also indicates that for some of them, acquiring British citizenship is a deliberate and meaningful step towards fortifying their identity and legally becoming British. Furthermore, the decision to acquire British citizenship reflects the fluid nature of identities in a globalised world (Appadurai, 1990). People are increasingly navigating multiple cultural, social, and national affiliations, making choices that align with their self-perceived identities and aspirations.

According to the 2021 Census, the number of non-UK-born residents who held dual citizenship, including British citizenship and citizenship from other countries, increased from 381,200 dual citizens in 2011 to 648,700 in 2021. Naturalisation among non-UK-born residents was not limited to those with dual citizenship. In fact, more than half of non-EU-born residents with a single passport held only a British passport. This percentage was substantially lower for EU-born single passport holders. Interestingly, the majority of individuals holding dual British and other citizenship predominantly identify with a British national identity. This identification with a British national identity became more pronounced the longer these individuals had resided in the United Kingdom. Notably, a stronger British identity was identified among non-EU passport holders compared to their EU counterparts. Many international migrants who become naturalised citizens in the United Kingdom are eligible for dual citizenship. However, in cases where dual citizenship is not allowed, a naturalised citizen may only possess a British passport, as is the case of Malaysian nationals. In the same vein, the 2021 Census data reveal that the relatively low rates of British dual citizenship among individuals from Somalia (0.4%), Afghanistan (1.5%), and Uganda (2.2%) are influenced by legal, social, and individual factors. These percentages illustrate the broader geopolitical dynamics, legal restrictions in home countries, socioeconomic conditions, and the specific nature of migration flows that shape decisions on dual citizenship. In some countries, legal frameworks prohibit or impose stringent conditions on dual citizenship, complicating the process for residents in the United Kingdom.

Moreover, the socioeconomic instability and political turmoil in their home countries often prioritises immediate safety and basic needs for these individuals, overshadowing the long-term planning required for acquiring dual citizenship. Refugees and asylum seekers from these regions face additional hurdles and uncertainties, given their often-precarious legal status in the United Kingdom. Their decision to maintain a singular national identity may be driven by a desire to return to their countries under safer conditions or the need to preserve their original nationality for personal safety or political reasons. These findings demonstrate the necessity for a nuanced understanding of the factors influencing dual citizenship decisions. The emphasis on the necessity for policymakers and support organisations to create tailored strategies acknowledges the diverse challenges and backgrounds of these immigrant communities. This approach aims to ensure that integration efforts and citizenship policies are comprehensive and attuned to the distinct experiences and requirements of individuals from various sociopolitical contexts. Thus, the data provided shed light on citizenship and identity processes among non-UK-born residents in the United Kingdom, illustrating the vivid experiences and decisions they face. This includes navigating the balance between retaining their original citizenship and cultivating a British identity, all while contending with external factors that shape their choices and paths in the United Kingdom. This insight is crucial for developing informed policies that support the nuanced journey of immigrants as they integrate and establish their identities in a new cultural and legal landscape.

The acquisition of British citizenship in this context becomes a conscious act of embracing a particular national identity and all that it entails. This includes the requirements needed to be eligible for British citizenship acquisition, such as having lived in the United Kingdom for 5 years, having ILR or ‘settled status’, passing the Life in the UK test, providing proof of English language proficiency, and so on, along with paying a substantial amount in fees (UK Home Office). Some of these points have been discussed in section 4.4.2. When exploring the importance of language proficiency in the citizenship or naturalisation process, a comparative approach across different countries can indeed be an eye-opener. In countries like Australia, the United States, and France, knowledge of the dominant language is a key requirement for those seeking citizenship/naturalisation. This requirement highlights the role of language in integrating individuals into the social, cultural, and political fabric of a nation. In Australia, applicants for citizenship must demonstrate a basic knowledge of the English

language, reflecting the country's emphasis on English for effective participation in society.[36] Similarly, the United States requires applicants to pass an English test and a civics test in English, emphasising the role of language in understanding American government and history.[37] France, too, places a significant emphasis on language proficiency for naturalisation. Applicants must demonstrate a sufficient level of French, considered essential for social integration and participation in French society.[38] This requirement reflects the broader European context, where language proficiency is often seen as crucial for social cohesion and integration. Canada's approach, as highlighted by Kymlicka (1995), is particularly noteworthy for its bilingual nature. The requirement to learn either English or French reflects the country's commitment to its dual linguistic heritage.[39] This policy not only facilitates integration into Canada's linguistically diverse society but also symbolises the country's recognition of the importance of both languages in its national identity. Comparatively, these requirements illustrate how different countries perceive and integrate the role of language in the citizenship process. While the specifics vary, the underlying principle is that language proficiency is seen as vital for ensuring that new citizens can fully participate in and contribute to their new country's social, political, and economic life. This comparative perspective not only highlights the commonalities and differences across nations but also underlines the universal role of language as a cornerstone of national identity and integration.

For Malaysians, obtaining British citizenship not only means gaining a new nationality. It also means relinquishing Malaysian nationality, as "the Malaysian Constitution deprived potential dual nationals from exercising any rights accorded exclusively to the citizens of their foreign country" (Low, 2017: 20). According to Jaspal and Cinnirella (2011), it is essential for individuals within a group not only to identify and understand their own identity, but also to identify and discover who they are not—or, for these participants, who they have become less of.

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[36] "English as the national language. Australian society values the English language as the national language of Australia, and as an important unifying element of society. It is important to learn to speak English because it helps to get an education, a job, and better integrate into the community." "Australian citizenship
Learn about being an Australian citizen", *The Department of Home Affairs, Australian Government*.

[37] "In general, applicants for naturalization must demonstrate an understanding of the English language, including an ability to read, write, and speak words in ordinary usage." "Volume 12 - Citizenship and Naturalization." *U.S. Department of Homeland Security*.

[38] "Knowledge of French. You must show proof of a sufficient knowledge of the French language." "How to Obtain French Nationality?" *Service Public*.

[39] "If you're between 18 and 54 years old on the day you sign your application, you must show that you have an adequate knowledge of English or French." "Apply for Canadian Citizenship." *Government of Canada.*

> E09: I think I've lost a lot of my Malaysian identity. Well obviously, the outer skin, the outer layer is there. But I think the way I think and the way I behave, and the way I rationalise things are totally different. I've lived 38, almost 40 odd years away from Malaysia. So, you're bound to change, not the same person anymore. I'm now a British citizen.

E09 describes a profound transformation in her identity. She expressed a sense of loss, stating that she had relinquished a substantial amount of her Malaysian identity over the years. Although some superficial characteristics may still persist, such as physical appearance or cultural customs, she believes that her fundamental thinking patterns, behaviours. These changes are attributed to her prolonged period of living abroad, spanning nearly four decades. E09 also highlighted the impact of acquiring British citizenship, which further solidified her transformation and influenced her evolving sense of self. This reflection underscores the fluid aspect of identity and how prolonged exposure to a different cultural context, combined with legal status changes, can reshape one's core identity and foster a sense of becoming a different person.

> E14: To be very honest with you, I actually feel very British. Only because where I live, people are all very British. There aren't many Malaysians, or foreigners apart from English people living around my area. The only time that I feel Malaysian is when I ring home or speak to my sister who lives in [England]. Other than that, I feel very British.

E14's narrative highlights how the local social context and community composition can strongly impact one's sense of identity. E14's immersion in a predominantly British community has led her to adopt a strong British identity. The scarcity of Malaysians or other foreigners in her area of residence further reinforces her identification with British culture. However, she still acknowledges her Malaysian heritage when engaging with her immediate family. These instances serve as reminders of her Malaysian roots. Beyond those interactions, she perceives herself as British. This demonstrates the complex interplay between the length of her residency, local environment, familial connections, and personal experiences in shaping one's identity.

> E66: I feel British now more than as a Malaysian. I have already accepted that moving to the UK and adapting to life here have somewhat made me feel as such.

Similarly, E66 expressed a shift in her sense of identity, indicating that she now identifies more strongly as British rather than Malaysian, suggesting a significant transformation in her self-perception and cultural affiliation. The acceptance of these changes has been attributed to experiences and adaptation to life in the United Kingdom, playing a substantial role in shaping her newfound sense of being British. It implies that the process of integration into British society and the adjustments made in her daily life have contributed to this shift in identity. It highlights how identity, one's surroundings, and experiences can shape and redefine one's sense of belonging. Her self-reflection indicates a level of self-awareness and introspection regarding factors contributing to her transformative identity.

The excerpts above have brought to light the complexity of identity transformation, illustrating how cultural and environmental factors significantly shape an individual's sense of belonging, especially in a globalised world where migration and cultural integration are commonplace. The participants' experiences demonstrate how living in a different country and adapting to a new culture can lead to changes in one's self-perception and identification with a particular national or cultural identity. Aligning with these excerpts, participant E70's experience encapsulates this transition accurately. His statement, "I feel more British now", underscores a significant shift in his identity perception. This sentiment reflects not just a superficial change but a deep-seated emotional and psychological transformation. E70's growing affinity for British culture and various aspects of life in the United Kingdom signifies a profound integration of his identity with the new cultural milieu. Contrastingly, E09 presents a different facet of this identity transformation. By asserting her legal status as a British citizen without explicitly expressing the emotional aspects of feeling British, she introduces a compelling dimension to the discussion. Her perspective prompts us to consider the legal and formal aspects of national identity, which, while crucial, represent only one part of the identity puzzle. This distinction between legal status and emotional identity is further highlighted by the other participants' emphasis on *feeling* British rather than *being* British. Such expressions suggest a layered understanding of identity, where legal and administrative status does not necessarily encapsulate the full essence of one's national or cultural belonging. The nuanced difference between identifying as British and feeling British raises critical questions about the authenticity and transparency of the participants' responses regarding their British citizenship. This discrepancy begs a deeper inquiry: Are they telling the whole truth? Are the participants providing a complete picture of their identity transformation, or are there underlying factors influencing their articulation of Britishness? This exploration is not just academic; it holds

profound existential implications for understanding identity in a multicultural and interconnected world.

The identity transformation among the participants, particularly within the context of Malaysia's prohibition on dual citizenship, presents an important aspect of this study. The legal constraints imposed by Malaysian authorities create a unique situation for these individuals, who must navigate between their cultural and national identities within these boundaries. Malaysia's strict stance on dual citizenship is crucial in understanding the participants' responses and the words they choose to articulate their identity. This legal backdrop may significantly influence how they express their connection to British culture and identity. The avoidance of explicitly claiming British citizenship could be a strategic decision to circumvent potential legal repercussions, including the risk of losing their Malaysian nationality (Low, 2017). This situation offers two primary interpretations regarding the participants' sense of identity and sentimental status. Firstly, it is possible that the participants have consciously chosen to maintain their Malaysian nationality, eschewing the formal process of acquiring British citizenship. This choice does not diminish the depth of their cultural assimilation or the emotional ties they have developed with the United Kingdom. Their prolonged residence in the country has fostered a deep sense of personal connection and emotional attachment to British culture, values, and the overall way of life. When they express *feeling* British, it highlights an experiential and sentimental dimension to their identity, which transcends legal or administrative labels. Such expressions of identity give prominence to the subjective nature of cultural belonging and identity. They reflect a personal journey of integration and adaptation, where the participants have absorbed and internalised aspects of British culture to the extent that it forms a significant part of their self-perception and identity, even if not officially recognised through citizenship. This nuanced exploration of identity illustrates the oscillation between legal status, cultural assimilation, and emotional ties in identity formation, providing key insights into the complex process of cultural integration and the evolution of identity in a transnational setting, ultimately influencing individuals' sense of belonging.

The second interpretation presents an intriguing perspective on the participants' identity, suggesting that some may have indeed acquired British citizenship. In this scenario, their identification with Britishness transcends mere legal and administrative acknowledgment, venturing into a deep-seated sense of connection and affinity with British culture and society, reflecting a profound and layered bond with their new homeland. This scenario highlights a critical aspect of identity formation: the distinction between *being* British in a legal sense and

feeling British at an experiential and emotional level. Such a distinction emphasises the role of personal lived experiences and cultural influences in shaping one's identity, suggesting that the process of identity transformation is not solely predicated on legal recognition but is deeply influenced by the day-to-day experiences, interactions, and cultural immersion that individuals undergo in their new environment. The participants' sense of Britishness, in this case, is not just a matter of possessing a passport or enjoying the legal rights of citizenship. It is about feeling an intrinsic part of the British community, sharing in its values, participating in its cultural life, and forming emotional attachments within this context. This deep identification with British culture signifies a multi-layering of identities, where the legal and the experiential intertwine to form a rich, nuanced sense of self. Moreover, this interpretation acknowledges that adopting a new cultural identity does not necessitate the complete abandonment of one's original identity. The participants' ongoing connection to their Malaysian roots, through familial ties or occasional feelings of Malaysian identity, illustrates the dynamic and fluid nature of cultural identity, epitomising the idea that individuals can embrace a new cultural identity while still retaining and valuing aspects of their original heritage. This dual sense of identity reflects a sophisticated navigation of cultural landscapes, where individuals can find a sense of belonging and identity in multiple cultures simultaneously, defying simplistic notions of identity as fixed or tied to a single nationality or culture, offering instead a more flexible and inclusive understanding of how people define themselves in the contemporary world.

Of a similar mindset, in-depth interviews carried out among the Jamaican diaspora in Toronto by Henry (1994) provide a comparative perspective to the discussion on identity transformation among the Malaysian participants in the United Kingdom. In Henry's study, the focus was on Jamaicans in Canada, many of whom navigate predicaments of holding dual citizenship or choosing between their Jamaican and Canadian identities. Despite the legal recognition of their dual status, a significant number of these individuals do not adopt a hyphenated identity that merges their Jamaican and Canadian selves. Instead, they predominantly identify with their Jamaican origins or racial backgrounds, which suggests a strong attachment to their roots and a prioritisation of their original cultural identity over their acquired one. This finding is particularly illuminating when juxtaposed with the experiences of the Malaysian participants in the United Kingdom. While Malaysians face legal restrictions against dual citizenship, leading to a nuanced expression of their British identity, the Jamaicans in Toronto, who do not face such legal constraints, still choose to align more closely with their original identity. This pattern suggests that the process of identity transformation and

integration is not solely contingent on legal status but is deeply influenced by personal choices, cultural affinities, and the desire to maintain a connection to one's roots. The Jamaican diaspora's approach to identity offers a lens through which to understand the Malaysian participants' experiences, highlighting that the transition from one national identity to another is a complex process influenced by a variety of factors, including personal beliefs, cultural attachments, and the individual's negotiation between their original and new cultural contexts. The decision to not embrace a hyphenated identity but rather to identify with one's country of origin or racial background can be seen as a form of cultural resilience or a means to preserve a sense of authenticity and continuity in one's self-perception. These diasporic experiences in both cases illustrate how individuals from diverse backgrounds perceive and articulate their identities amid their original cultural influences and their experiences in a new cultural environment. It showcases the many ways in which people navigate their identities in the context of migration and cultural integration, shaping unique interpretations of what it means to transition from one national identity to another.

To ensure the cohesion of the family unit, E03 resorted to significant and consequential measures.

> E03: I'm a bit upset that Malaysia doesn't recognise dual citizenship. I wanted the same passport as my boys for convenience and to feel safer too. So, I did give up my Malaysian citizenship. But I am very much at home here. I feel this is home now.

E03 conveyed a mix of emotions regarding her citizenship and sense of belonging. Her desire to have the same passport as her children for convenience and security, which meant renouncing her Malaysian citizenship, was a result of Malaysia's policy of not recognising dual citizenship. Indeed, as mentioned earlier, the Malaysian government does not recognise dual nationality. In other words, in order to acquire British citizenship, a Malaysian national must renounce their citizenship by surrendering all legal documents pertaining to their Malaysian citizenship, such as their original Malaysian passport, their original Malaysian identification card, their original Malaysian birth certificate, and so on. This stringent policy reflects the Malaysian government's stance on maintaining single nationality and emphasises the importance of a singular national identity. By requiring the renunciation of Malaysian citizenship, the government aims to uphold the exclusivity and integrity of Malaysian citizenship.

The prohibition of dual citizenship is a policy that several countries around the world adopt, each with its unique legal frameworks and reasons for such a stance. Much like Malaysia, countries like Andorra, Djibouti, Indonesia, India, and Japan also do not permit their citizens to hold dual citizenship (Henderson, 2024). This policy reflects a variety of national interests, legal principles, and cultural values, influencing how individuals from these countries navigate their identities when living abroad. In Andorra, for instance, the country's approach to citizenship is influenced by its small size and unique geopolitical position. Similarly, Japan's prohibition on dual citizenship aligns with its national identity policies and legal framework, emphasising a singular national allegiance. India, on the other hand, offers a form of overseas citizenship, which is not full citizenship but allows a connection to the country without granting political rights. The implications of such policies are profound for individuals from these countries who live abroad, as they must face the difficulties of identity, belonging, and legal status in their host countries. The decision to renounce one's original citizenship to adopt another is fraught with significant personal, cultural, and legal ramifications, involving a weighing of one's deep-rooted connections to their country of origin against the practical and emotional benefits of the new nationality. For diaspora communities from these countries, the absence of dual citizenship means continuously balancing between maintaining their cultural heritage and integrating into the new society. This phenomenon shapes their identity, influencing how they perceive themselves and are perceived by others in their host lands (Dolezal, 2012). This global perspective on dual citizenship policies highlights the diversity of national approaches to citizenship and identity, focusing on the fact that the experience of migrants and diaspora communities is deeply intertwined with the legal frameworks of their home and host countries, profoundly affecting their personal identity journeys and how they navigate the intersection of legal status and cultural belonging.

This process of renunciation can be viewed as a significant and consequential step for those in the same situation as E03, who finds herself faced with the emotional weight of giving up her Malaysian citizenship in order to have a sense of security and legal bond with her children. It draws attention to the sacrifices involved not only with the steep application fees required but also in navigating dual nationality issues, and the impact it can have on individuals and their families, as well as the challenges and dilemmas they face when reconciling multiple identities and the different countries they are attached to. Renouncing her Malaysian citizenship, E03 strongly identified with her current residence, stating that she feels "at home" in her current location. She expressed a sense of attachment and belonging, emphasising that

the current place of residence is now her home. This excerpt reveals the difficulties and conflicting emotions associated with the decision to give up one's citizenship. E03's desire for convenience and a sense of security is contrasted with her emotional connection to her new home. It highlights the personal factors and practical considerations that one must weigh when making decisions about citizenship and the impact these decisions have on the sense of belonging and identity. Taking a deeper perspective, it is plausible to interpret E03's emotional connection and acquisition of British citizenship as being primarily influenced by her children. This factor likely played a significant role in her decision to acknowledge that, in order to remain with her children and ensure legal unity, it would be prudent to possess the same legal documentation as them. Through the act of renouncing her Malaysian citizenship and embracing the United Kingdom as her home, it can be inferred that E03's deep connection is likely motivated by the presence of her children in that country. E03's understanding of home revolves around the presence of her children, even if it necessitates forgoing legal entitlements in her birth country. Consequently, she is compelled to accept the reality of her current country of residence in order to lead a fulfilling life. E03's experience reflects the intricate relationship between citizenship, emotional attachment, and the concept of home in relation to her children.

Whether participants have obtained citizenship or not, obtaining it undeniably shapes both collective and individual identities, as demonstrated by their strong sense of feeling British and, in some cases, their deliberate choice to pursue British citizenship. For instance, E19 expresses a preference for committing fully to his life in the United Kingdom rather than in Malaysia.

> I think I'd rather be a citizen here and build my life here as opposed to being one foot in here and one foot in Malaysia.

E19's narrative indicates a compelling aspiration to fully assimilate into British society, signifying a complete acceptance and a commitment to contribute and integrate. The metaphor of having "one foot in here and one foot in Malaysia" portrays the challenge of juggling dual identities. While it is possible to maintain robust ties with both the homeland and the new country, E19 appears to lean towards concentrating on one rather than navigating between two national identities. Recognising the intricate process of identity formation and the impact of citizenship is essential to gaining a deeper understanding of belonging in this transnational era and modern-day society. It highlights how legal status, and the associated sense of national affiliation can deeply influence one's perception of self and one's place within a broader

community. By acknowledging these complexities, there can be a better appreciation of the various facets of identity and factors that contribute to the construction of one's sense of identity and belonging in the process of "becoming" through "identity production" (Hall, 1990: 222). This process of understanding and adapting to their lives in their current place of residence contributes to the development of a distinct perspective on the transition from being Malaysian to becoming British.

5.3.5. Returning to Malaysia: the "in-between" space

As previously discussed, the majority of participants feel a sense of connection to Malaysia primarily because they were born there, and it is where their roots are established. The participants' definition of ethnocultural identity includes language, customs and traditions, and cuisine, which collectively symbolise Malaysianness. Hall's understanding of national culture suggests that it shapes individual identities by creating interpretations of the nation that people can relate to. These interpretations are conveyed through narratives, "the past continues to speak to us. But it no longer addresses us as a simple, factual 'past' […]. It is always constructed through memory, fantasy, narrative and myth" (Hall, 1990: 226). In line with this concept, the participants experienced moments of "cultural consciousness" (Kapur-Dromson, 2007: preface x), a sense of nostalgia and shared stories that deeply resonated with memories of their birth country. According to Brubaker, the concept of "homeland orientation" (2005: 5) or the identification with one's birth country is a significant aspect of the diasporic experience. This orientation towards one's birth country reflects the enduring emotional and cultural ties that individuals maintain with their country of origin, even when residing in different locations. The participants' accounts, reflective in different ways and to varying degrees of their primordial connection to Malaysia while being away, exemplify the manner in which they expressed their relationship with the country. Some of the participants expressed their desire for a potential return to Malaysia for retirement. This desire is not merely a reflection of a personal longing for the familiar but is deeply intertwined with significant social and familial factors. The motivations for returning are manifold and profoundly rooted in the participants' social fabric. Strong family ties emerge as a pivotal reason, giving prominence to the importance of kinship and the deep-seated desire to be close to loved ones. The aspiration to rejoin family and friends speaks to a fundamental human need for community and belonging, which participants find more fulfilling in their Malaysian context. Homesickness further accentuates this sentiment, revealing a profound emotional connection to the physical and cultural landscapes of Malaysia that participants miss while abroad. The discomfort and challenges associated with adjusting to a foreign environment amplify this feeling, making the idea of returning even more appealing. Experiences of racial harassment in the host country contribute to a sense of alienation and discomfort, prompting participants to seek solace in the more familiar and accepting social milieu of Malaysia. Moreover, the pursuit of an improved social status, which might be more attainable in their home country due to established networks and a deeper understanding of the local socioeconomic landscape, is a significant draw.

Others shared their desire to maintain familial and friendship ties with their birth country without a permanent return. For them, there is the possibility of maintaining homeland loyalty through events/activities/social gatherings in host countries. Some actively participate in the politics of their birth country while living in the country where they have settled. Brown's (2006) assertion that South Asians are proactive citizens who actively participate in the public life of South Asia, especially in regions of their homeland where conflicts have arisen, is not only applicable to the Indian subcontinent, but also to Malaysians who hold similar beliefs and convictions. E25 was particularly vocal about his commitment to changes in Malaysia.

> E25: I want to go back and give it a try because I think it's about time to go back home. Especially I think in Malaysia, the only resource we have left are the people there, the *rakyat* [the people in Malay], with the way it's going. I mean, maybe we can make a small change somewhere.

E25 acknowledges that the people of Malaysia, referred to as "the rakyat" are a valuable resource who can potentially bring about positive change. His willingness and motivation to get involved in light of the political instability and bias in Malaysia reflects a sense of responsibility, duty, and a desire to advocate change by leveraging the collective power of the people. This statement further suggests a strong attachment to Malaysia and commitment to actively engage in its development and transformation for the better. His sense of loyalty and commitment to his homeland is in agreement with Ratnam's loyalty to the state as a collective entity, which he refers to as "healthy patriotism" (2019: 5). Citizens like E25 show a deep interest in the matters of their own nation, their shared future, among fellow citizens, or "*rakyat*", reiterating the narrative of E25. However, he admits to belonging "neither here nor there" after having lived away from his birth country for a long time.

> E25: [W]hen you live in different places, you think or do things in a different way. And so, you take the best from both cultures, or as many cultures to become yourself, I guess. But I think the problem is, over here you don't really fit in as British. But then when you go home, you don't fit as much as a Malaysian either.

There are challenges in navigating between different cultural contexts and in being "suspended between two worlds" (Hall, 2017: 203). The statement underscores the complex nature of identity formation for Malaysians with multiple cultural influences and the potential difficulty in finding a sense of belonging in either culture. E25's experience of multiple homes

symbolises his diverse cultural identity, which aligns with Bhabha's sense of in-betweenness. When immigrants return to Malaysia, they may experience a sense of unfamiliarity that requires them to readapt. Introduced in section 5.2.2, the "reverse culture shock" phenomenon described by Storti and John and Jeanne Gullahorn refers to the psychological and emotional challenges people face when going back to their home country after an extended period abroad. As explored in section 3.2.3, Bhabha's concept of "homeliness", which builds on Hall's idea of "home", acknowledges that it cannot be fully regained or restored exactly as it was initially experienced or imagined. Constantly influenced by historical, political, and cultural factors, the notion of "home" is unstable with a twist of "strange familiarity" (Waters, 2018), leading to transformations, ruptures, and dislocations that disrupt any fixed understanding of "home". The in-between cultural experience is a complex and fragmented process that occurs both in the country of settlement and upon returning to one's birth country, where the possibility of a "Third Space" (Bhabha, 1994) may emerge as part of the process of finding a renewed sense of belonging. As Tedeschi *et al.* posit in *Transnationalism: current debates and new perspectives*:

> This imaginary homeland often results in nostalgia, homesickness, a 'myth of return' or 'dream of return', with moving back perceived as highly desirable, but rarely implemented. (2022: 613)

The themes of "nostalgia, homesickness, a 'myth of return' or 'dream of return'" and the existential importance of homeland for diaspora communities overlap with Alinia and Eliassi's work (2014). Both sets of authors discuss how first-generation immigrants often harbour a strong desire to return to their homeland, yet this desire is frequently not fulfilled. In Alinia and Eliassi's study, a group of Kurds living in diaspora expressed that the first-generation immigrants frequently envision a future where they can return to their homeland while still alive, although they remain uncertain about the timing and feasibility of such a return. However, "the dream of return seems to be as existential for them as the creation of a home(land) is here" (2014: 79). This statement holds true for some of the participants of this research who encompass the first-generation cohort and have "dream[s]" of returning to Malaysia ingrained in their minds from the moment they set foot in the host country. The concept of the "myth of return" described by Anwar (1979) goes beyond a mere demographic movement to encompass the desire of returning to their birth country, while simultaneously facing challenges in maintaining connections to their native home. The concept posits that diasporic communities harbour a future aspiration to return to their homeland. This concept

suggests a deep-seated longing within these communities to reconnect with their roots, regardless of whether this return is practical or even possible. This is a powerful sentiment that often shapes the identity and actions of diasporic communities. Through my observation, there may also be an element of contentment in the host country, as individuals consider the pros and cons of life in the United Kingdom versus Malaysia. They may question whether it is truly worth returning "home" and ponder where "home" really is now. In research conducted by Ali and Holden (2006) on Pakistani mobilities, the "myth of return" initially suggested that Pakistanis moved to the United Kingdom as economic migrants for temporary settlement, with plans to eventually return to Pakistan. However, this idea was short-lived as these individuals and their families ended up establishing permanent residences in the new country, driven by the employment prospects and upgraded standards of living. In other words, the notion of clinging to the possibility of a return to one's homeland often transforms into a myth. These findings echo in some of the narratives from the researched participants of the thesis. While 58% of the participants have stated that their migration to the United Kingdom is permanent, 25% were unsure of their migration settlement plans, and 19% of them have stated their migration to be a temporary one.

> I01: My husband (British) and I have always said that we will retire back in Malaysia, where the weather is better, and the living costs are a little bit lower. So, that's the plan.
>
> E34: Well, the short answer is I don't know as plans change. For now, I am staying here at least for the next five years but I am not averse to returning to Malaysia too.

I01's narrative of favouring the weather conditions and comparatively lower cost of living as factors contributing to her plans of retiring in Malaysia with her husband suggests a definite intention and commitment to eventually settling in Malaysia. I01 narrative is interpreted as a lifestyle migration, in that, she and her husband are driven by the desire to improve their quality of life and pursue a specific lifestyle. Unlike economic or forced migration, lifestyle migration often transcends economic necessity or political factors and reflects the deliberate pursuit of personal well-being (Benson & O'Reilly, 2018), in addition to warmer climate and lower cost of living for I01. In contrast, E34's narrative reflects a more uncertain outlook. She acknowledges that plans can change and admits to not having a clear answer. Despite this, E34 remains open to the possibility of returning to Malaysia in the future, indicating a certain level

of flexibility in her plans, which places her in an in-between position. The distinction in their attitudes towards future plans highlights the contrasting levels of certainty and commitment in their respective plans. While I01's plan indicates a clear intention and a more fixed trajectory towards retiring in Malaysia, E34 has a less definitive stance and greater degree of adaptability and a willingness to consider alternative options, as well as the possibility of returning to Malaysia but without committing to a specific timeframe or course of action—a return that may possibly be mythical. Their in-between position of straddling two homes and the crucial role of the emotional connection between diasporic communities and their home countries in shaping their identities evoke questions about how Malaysians are perceived upon returning to Malaysia and whether there is an impact on their sense of belonging in their birth country (Cakmak, 2021).

The flow of the interview questions brought me to probe the participants in my research on how they felt upon returning to Malaysia for a holiday. 20% of the participants avowed feeling foreign and a sense of unbelonging and unfamiliarity in Malaysia, to the point of having to sometimes try and assimilate back into Malaysian society when on holiday. A level of patriotism for both countries was evident, reflecting mixed feelings of allegiance and emotional connection between their birth country and host country.

> E33: Everything seems so familiar, and unfamiliar at the same time. And I wonder, where do I belong to? Suddenly you feel like a foreigner looking through the eyes of a tourist. It's really very sad because this is your home [Malaysia], isn't it? I don't know whether it's the country that has changed or me. I think it's probably both, because you've changed your thought process as well. You think differently.
>
> E65: It's a strange mix of being in an unfamiliar place, but yet having the feeling of familiarity. I think it's mainly due to family/friends - once we're reunited it does make Malaysia feel a lot more like home.

Both excerpts reflect the complex emotions and experiences regarding their sense of belonging and connection to Malaysia. Both passages convey a sense of ambivalence, in-betweenness and an amalgam of familiarity and unfamiliarity in what Hall calls "the emotional imagined or remembered space" (2017: 211). E33's phrase "foreigner looking through the eyes of a tourist" underlines her detachment and a feeling of being an outsider upon returning to her birth country, attributing it to a shift in her thought process which suggests personal growth and

transformation. This statement goes in parallel with E30's position of "an outsider back home with [her] accent and mannerisms". The paradox of being in an unfamiliar place yet feeling a sense of familiarity is largely linked to the relationships and reunification with loved ones for E65. These narratives imply that the concept of "home" is not solely determined by tangible elements but is influenced by personal changes, perspectives, and social connections. Cakmak builds on Hall's argument on diasporic immigrants' inability to return to their birth country not due to legal constraints but rather as a matter of "lifestyle choices" (2021: 2).

> E13: I love going home to my family and friends. I think Malaysians look at me differently and I do feel different even though I identify myself as Malaysian.
>
> S07: I am more aware of the differences between the UK and Malaysia, both the good and the bad. I also feel that I have a different mindset from Malaysians who have never lived overseas.
>
> E37: I feel like because I have adapted to a lot of the UK lifestyle, and I have changed. I think that since becoming a mother, having a child, I really noticed little changes like British politeness of saying thank you, opening the door or waiting to let you go pass first.

Being perceived differently by Malaysians despite identifying as Malaysian, having a broader perspective and a different mindset compared with Malaysians who have not lived abroad, or experienced changes in lifestyle, behaviour and etiquette as part of the process of adaptation and assimilation into British culture underscore the ambivalence and impact of living in a different country on one's sense of belonging and cultural in-betweenness. Exposure to different cultures, experiences, and personal life events can lead to changes in mindset, behaviour, and the way one is perceived by others, Malaysians in the native land in this case. Cakmak's (2021) qualitative research on Turkish immigrants living in London revealed that since migration, both their birth country and immigrants have undergone changes, resulting in a preference for and adaptation to the lifestyle in London. Likewise, some of the research participants revealed that their initial short-term migration to the United Kingdom transformed into a long-term one as they were no longer able to assimilate back into the Malaysian ethnocentrically biased political system and lifestyle.

Living abroad for a significant amount of time can affect many aspects of a person's life. These include culture, lifestyle, traditions, customs, identity, sense of belonging and language, to name a few. Some participants have expressed feeling like a foreigner and having to refresh their memory on the home language.

> E47: I tend to go back on holidays like a foreigner. It's strange cos I need to think about that how to speak Malay again. But after a week, you tend to remember back all the basic Malay that you remember as a young age.

> E48: I had a bit of an identity crisis because I went back to Malaysia, I had a slight accent. And people were like, "Why are you speaking like that?" And so, I had to readjust slowly. I think as I became more comfortable with who I am and of being both. When I go back to Malaysia, I switch back to my Malaysian self, speaking Manglish. When I was a bit younger, it was black and white. I had to be one or the other, I couldn't be both. Whereas now, it's like I'm both and another person.

In E47's narrative, she articulated feeling like a foreigner and the need to brush up on her Malay language, similar to E48 in her need to readjust gradually into colloquialism (Manglish) each time she returns to Malaysia for visits. They indicate feeling an initial stage of unfamiliarity; however, memories and knowledge of their home language resurface as they spend more time in Malaysia. Furthermore, E48 spoke about experiencing an identity crisis and feeling compelled to choose one identity over the other in the past. Over time, E48's narrative indicates a shift from a binary understanding of identity—feeling the need to oscillate between being Malaysian or adopting another cultural identity—to embracing a more fluid and hybrid ethnocultural identity. The transition from viewing identity in "black and white" terms to acknowledging the possibility of embodying multiple identities signifies significant personal growth and acceptance of a complex identity. The phrase "I'm both and another person" suggests that she now recognises the capacity to inhabit multiple ethnocultural identities simultaneously while also developing a unique personal identity that transcends these individual cultural components. This new identity is not merely a sum of parts (Malaysian and another culture) but an entirely distinct entity that incorporates elements of each culture yet is defined by more than just those elements. This evolution reflects a more nuanced understanding of identity, acknowledging that individuals can integrate various cultural influences into their self-concept without having to choose one over the other. It represents a dynamic and

integrative approach to identity formation, which is particularly relevant in a globalised world where individuals are increasingly exposed to and influenced by multiple cultures. Their journey exemplifies the complexity of identity among people who straddle different cultures and the potential for growth and self-discovery through navigating these intersections, highlighting the fluidity of identity and the possibility of cultivating a sense of self that is adaptable, multifaceted, and ultimately unique to each individual.

These excerpts have brought to light the challenges and nuances of identity when living in or returning to one's birth country after spending time abroad. They showcase the reintegration, language relearning, and identity navigation that they have undergone as they reconcile their past and present selves, cultural influences, and perceptions from others.

> E68: I've been away from home since 2008. I do feel out of place because I think when you live in other parts of the world, when you return to your home, you sometimes feel a disconnect with some people or friends who have never left. But mostly I feel at home when I'm back in Malaysia.
>
> E71: I get treated as a local and as a foreigner in both places.

Both excerpts acknowledge experiencing a sense of disconnection, being perceived differently, and grappling with the duality in terms of identity as both locals and foreigners in Malaysia, and in the United Kingdom for E71. Although E68 feels out of place, she feels at home upon returning to Malaysia, indicating a deep-rooted primordial bond to Malaysia despite the challenges of reconnecting with others. As for E71, the duality in treatment reflects the complexity of her identity which suggests the embodiment of elements from both cultures, leading to a mixed reception in both locations. These excerpts shed light on the dichotomy and complexity of these participants' experiences. They feel a sense of disconnect, being perceived as different due to the length of settlement abroad or "being 'out of place' as the product of a 'diasporic' displacement" (Said, 1999; Hall, 2017: 172; Les Back & Hall in Morley, 2008: 277), but they still consider Malaysia as home and have strong kinsmen bonds to the country. The participants' identities are shaped by a combination of their lived experiences abroad and their cultural upbringing in Malaysia, resulting in a nuanced sense of belonging and understanding in both their home country and the places they have lived.

The excerpts provided in this section showcase the nuanced experiences and emotions of individuals who have spent time living abroad and upon returning to Malaysia for a holiday.

Instead of breaking ties with one country in favour of another, many immigrants maintain connections with both their home and host countries in social, cultural, economic, and political aspects (Cakmak, 2021). They may be perceived as foreign due to distinct variations in several observable characteristics. These include, but are not limited to, distinct mannerisms, linguistic attributes such as accent, fluency, and colloquialisms, and physical appearance factors such as clothing fabric and style. I also observed that dermatological features like skin tone and texture influence this perception. The participants expressed a combination of familiarity and unfamiliarity, a sense of disconnect with those who have not left, and challenges in reconciling their multiple identities, or hybrid ethnocultural identity. They experienced a dual sense of identity, feeling simultaneously like a local and a foreigner in both their home and host countries. This experience echoes Hall's reflections on his own diasporic journey between Jamaica and England, where he poignantly states, "Whenever I go back, I think I'm at home, but still I'm not at home" (Les Back & Hall in Morley, 2008: 275). The statement captures a deep and nuanced sentiment often experienced by individuals who live between two or more cultures—the diaspora experience. This sentiment reflects a profound internal conflict and duality that affects one's sense of belonging and identity. On one level, it suggests a sense of familiarity and comfort associated with the concept of "home"—a place where one expects to feel a sense of belonging, rootedness, and acceptance. The initial part of the statement indicates a natural inclination to associate the physical act of returning with the emotional experience of coming home, where 'home' typically symbolises a place of origin or a place where one has formative memories and deep connections. However, the subsequent phrase introduces a paradoxical feeling, signalling that despite the geographical return to a familiar place, there is a lingering sense of alienation or estrangement. This could stem from various factors such as changes within the individual, transformations in the environment or community, or a sense of not fully fitting into the expected cultural or social norms. This duality hints at a layered and dynamic identity, one that is influenced by multiple cultures and experiences, suggesting that the individual's identity has been shaped by their experiences abroad, to the extent that their original cultural setting no longer feels entirely like home. It also speaks to a broader existential condition where the concept of home is not just a physical space but a psychological and emotional state that can be challenging to achieve in a fluid, ever-changing world. Moreover, Hall's statement can prompt a broader reflection on the concept of home and belonging in a globalised world, where movement across borders is common, and identities are increasingly fluid and hybridised. Navigating multiple cultural identities and the ongoing quest for a sense of belonging in a world where traditional notions of home and identity are continually being

redefined are intrinsically linked to "translocational positionality" as described by Anthias (2008). This suggests that identity and belonging are dynamically shaped by the intersection of geographical location, social position, and the fluidity of one's cultural experiences, emphasising that an individual's sense of self is not static but evolves through their physical location, social interactions, and personal experiences across different cultural and spatial landscapes. As such, the struggle for a sense of home and identity becomes a multidimensional process, deeply influenced by the changing and overlapping contexts in which an individual finds themselves, reflecting a broader understanding of identity as a process that is continually in flux and shaped by a myriad of factors beyond mere geography. Furthermore, the participants mentioned language readaptation, changes in mindset, and the influence of personal growth and life events. Despite these challenges, some of them still consider Malaysia as their true home, with deep-rooted bonds to the country. The participants' positionality has undergone a significant change through social and temporal dimensions, resulting in an enigmatic sense of belonging to both countries (Francis-Granger, 2023). These excerpts highlight the complexities of identity, the impact of cultural experiences, and the ongoing process of finding a sense of belonging and new positionality.

The participants, in this context, perceive Malaysian culture through a British lens, highlighting their cultural hybridity and the influence of British culture on them. This positioning underscores the presence of dual discourses and multiple perspectives in their narratives. Bhabha explains the notion of home in colonial and postcolonial understandings of migrant situations as "unhomeliness" where the border between home and the world becomes confused. Brah proposes that diasporas possess a desire for home, implying that the longing for return is a sentiment that brings diasporic individuals back to their original state or to a past conceived through memory (in Donald & Rattansi, 1992). In contrast, and as mentioned earlier, Bhabha's concept of "home" cannot be reclaimed exactly as it was imagined, implying that there is no possibility of returning to an original state. Instead, Bhabha proposes that embracing the feeling of "unhomeliness" presents a chance to create new spaces and foster a sense of novelty, rather than attempting to rigidly attach one's identity to a specific point of origin, as demonstrated by E48: "I'm both and another person". The cultural identity within other cultures signifies a shared historical experience that holds significant importance in postcolonial theory (Hall, 1994). The culture of the participants becomes intertwined with British culture, forming an in-between cultural space. Through the narratives exemplified above, the participants have created a third space for themselves in order to navigate a life

characterised by the coexistence of belonging to multiple homes and cultures creating an in-betweenness in the diasporic space. Which in turn impacts their sense of belonging to a place that they once called home, when returning to their birth country, as a familiar stranger (Hall, 2017).

5.3.6. Chapter summary

The hybrid ethnocultural identity of Malaysians living in the United Kingdom, as explored through qualitative interviews, reveals a dynamic blend of traditions, language, cuisine, and values, woven together to create an amalgamated hybrid identity. Through in-depth conversations with members of the Malaysian community in the United Kingdom, it has become evident that the process of navigating their ethnocultural identity in a foreign land has shaped a unique and rich fusion of heritage and adaptation. This amalgamation of diverse customs and practices emerges from the convergence of Malaysian heritage and the influence of the British multicultural landscape. The qualitative interviews have highlighted how these participants maintain a strong sense of attachment to their native culture while simultaneously embracing aspects of British lifestyle. Over the years, this community has navigated the challenges of balancing their native culture with the British way of life, leading to the emergence of a distinct hybrid ethnocultural identity.

Through interviews, I learned that "where we came from" (Hall, 1990) is significant in constructing the identity of participants. Participants draw on their heritage culture to make sense of their new life in the United Kingdom, but these interpretations are complex and not fixed. They grapple with an elusive Malaysian identity, experiencing ongoing transformations as they navigate settlement challenges and opportunities, influenced by migration disruptions and the desire to remain true to their values and beliefs. For some, their true identity is rooted in their birth country's culture, and they identify solely as Malaysians. For others, they have developed a hyphenated identity as they integrate and blend into Asian and British cultures, forming a new identity that aligns with their experiences living in the United Kingdom. Cultural encounter within British society has played a crucial role in shaping and transforming their identities, leading to a collective sense of belonging to both Malaysian and British cultures. Moving to the United Kingdom has resulted in a fusion of cultures, creating a unique third space. A small number of participants' acquisition of British citizenship has played a pivotal role in shaping their collective and individual identities, influencing their sense of belonging and national affiliation.

For some Malaysian participants in the United Kingdom, choosing to identify primarily with their Malaysian heritage rather than a specific ethnic lineage is a strategic and meaningful decision. This choice serves as a mechanism to sidestep potential stereotypes and prejudices, challenging and dismantling preconceived ideas. It promotes inclusivity and unity, essential

pillars of multiculturalism, among the Malaysian diaspora. While they continue to honour and engage with their ethnic traditions, languages, and customs, these individuals place a greater emphasis on their Malaysian national identity. This strategic prioritisation acts as a bridge, reducing divisions and celebrating the diversity that defines their community. In this unique milieu, the participants' Malaysian identity is refracted through a British cultural prism, illustrating a profound example of cultural hybridity. The influence of British culture interweaves with their Malaysian heritage, shaping their identity in new and dynamic ways. This phenomenon resonates with Homi Bhabha's "unhomeliness" where individuals find themselves crafting new identity spaces amidst familiar yet foreign cultural landscapes. The participants navigate this "Third Space", a concept that Bhabha articulates as an interstitial zone of cultural negotiation and innovation, where new forms of identity emerge. This Third Space is not just a theoretical construct but a lived experience for the participants, influencing their sense of belonging and identity. It engenders a complex, layered sense of self, where they are at once connected to and distinct from their cultural origins. This duality is particularly palpable when they return to Malaysia, where they might experience a sense of being a familiar stranger, embodying a unique blend of cultures and perspectives. Their identities are thus a mosaic, reflecting an ongoing dialogue between their Malaysian roots and British experiences, embodying a multifaceted sense of home and cultural affiliation.

The experiences of Malaysians in the United serve as a powerful demonstration of the enduring resilience of multiculturalism. In this setting, the blending of diverse traditions and customs does not just coexist; it flourishes, cultivating a sense of unity, empathy, and pride among individuals. In my view, multiculturalism is not dead; it remains highly relevant, as evidenced by the active participation of Malaysians. This engagement from Malaysian society brings multiculturalism to life, showcasing its significance through their cultural expressions and interactions. The principles of liberal multiculturalism are evident in the way Malaysians freely express their ethnocultural identities within a broader societal framework that values individual rights. At the same time, pluralist multiculturalism is reflected in the collective preservation of their diverse cultural heritage, which fosters a sense of community within the larger societal fabric. This real-world application brings to the fore that multiculturalism is far from dead; instead, it is a living, breathing aspect of the global society that requires continuous nurturing and evolution. These Malaysians exemplify how individuals can draw from the richness of multiple cultures to forge their unique identities, as highlighted by one respondent who eloquently notes the ability to "take the best from both cultures, or as many cultures to

become [themselves]" (E25). This process is not merely about selection and amalgamation; it is about creating their *own space* or *hybrid space*, terms I use to describe the unique cultural landscape where individuals can blend and personalise cultural elements to craft their own distinct identities. This space is emblematic of the dynamic nature of multiculturalism, showcasing how it can be a personal and communal journey toward creating a shared yet diversified cultural tapestry. These principles are crucial for developing a more inclusive and dynamic understanding of multiculturalism, tailored to meet the demands and opportunities of the present day. Individuals are shaped by a multitude of factors, including but not limited to their cultural background, personal experiences, relationships, and societal influences. These elements intertwine in unique ways to form the identities of individuals who are navigating the complex landscape of human identity and their place in this world.

5.4. Summary of Malaysian immigrants in the United Kingdom

In this part, I showed the assimilation and integration of Malaysian immigrants in the United Kingdom as a process influenced by socioeconomic, linguistic, and cultural factors. Despite encountering challenges such as discrimination, homesickness, and cultural differences, a significant proportion of Malaysian immigrants reported a sense of contentment. The integration process is facilitated by opportunities for cultural exchange and social interaction, which promote understanding and facilitate their integration into British society. Critical elements in this integration include accent acquisition and participation in social activities such as gastronomy, sports, parental and faith-based observances, charity work, pub culture, and adopting local fashion trends. These elements are crucial for immigrants to be regarded as members of society rather than outsiders.

This raises the question of whether these efforts constitute assimilation rather than integration. The fear of being different and unaccepted can drive migration to a host country, but a positive attitude toward diversity can facilitate living together through tolerance, equality, respect, and a tradition of dissent. Growing up in multicultural Malaysia, as illustrated by participant S08, instilled an openness to diversity, which aided in their integration and assimilation into other multicultural societies such as Canada and Australia. Participants' narratives revealed that their identity underwent significant transformation as they adapted to life in the United Kingdom, achieving integration through assimilation while retaining strong connections to their cultural heritage.

The integration strategies of diasporic Malaysians illustrate their transformation from life in Malaysia, a former British colony, a former British colony, to establishing residence in the United Kingdom. Despite their efforts toward a stronger sense of Britishness, the process of balancing their native culture with British life resulted in a distinct hybrid ethnocultural identity. This identity is shaped by diverse traditions, languages, cuisine, and values, merging Malaysian heritage with British multicultural influences. Interviews revealed that participants maintained strong ties to their native culture while embracing aspects of British life, creating a unique third space that blends cultures and perspectives.

Participants often prioritised their Malaysian national identity over specific ethnic lineages to avoid stereotypes and promote inclusivity. This strategic choice enhances multiculturalism and unity within the Malaysian diaspora. Their identity is shaped by the interplay of British and Malaysian cultures, reflecting a complex, layered sense of self. This

duality is particularly evident when they return to Malaysia, where they feel like familiar strangers, embodying a blend of cultures.

The experiences of Malaysians in the United Kingdom highlight the resilience of multiculturalism. Their active participation in cultural expressions and interactions demonstrates that multiculturalism remains relevant and vibrant. This resilience reflects elements of liberal multiculturalism, where Malaysians freely express their cultural identities within an inclusive legal and social framework, as well as pluralist multiculturalism, which allows for the collective preservation and celebration of their diverse heritage. Malaysians derive from multiple cultures to create unique identities, blending the best elements to form their own hybrid space. This process showcases the shifting nature of multiculturalism and the importance of nurturing and evolving it in contemporary society.

The research underscores that the integration of Malaysian immigrants is a dynamic process involving adaptation and the formation of a hybrid identity. The ability to navigate multiple cultural landscapes fosters a sense of belonging and identity that is both complex and multifaceted, illustrating the ongoing negotiation of cultural identities in a globalised world.

CONCLUSION

Discussion

The primary objective of my research has been to investigate the Malaysian diaspora in the United Kingdom, specifically those who have migrated from an ethnically biased, post-independent Malaysia where the remnants of racial ideology persistently shadow contemporary society. This research has sought to unravel the complex motives behind their migration, with a particular focus on how the ethnocentrically skewed education system in Malaysia has compelled Malaysians to pursue educational and employment opportunities abroad, especially in the United Kingdom. The narratives of the Malaysian participants in the United Kingdom not only highlight the push factors from Malaysia but also reveal a persistent loyalty to their country of origin, a sentiment that is poignant and reflective of the enduring ties to their cultural roots despite the geographical and sociocultural distance. The enduring impact of British colonialism in Malaysia has significantly influenced their migration choices and the evolution of their identities as they navigate their existence in a new homeland. The lived experiences of these individuals shed light on their experiences of feeling marginalised, giving prominence to their relentless quest for a more inclusive representation abroad. By probing into the historical context of British imperialism in Malaysia, this research enriches one's understanding of how colonial legacies in ethnicity, education, employment, and nationality continue to imprint the lives of Malaysian migrants. Ultimately, this research has not only examined the migration patterns of the Malaysian diaspora but has also underscored the potential for transformative social change by leveraging the insights and experiences of these diasporic citizens.

Through qualitative interviews, participants' narratives have illuminated in depth the motivations behind their migration to the United Kingdom, predominantly driven by the quest for academic excellence and professional advancement due to the ethnic prejudices ingrained within Malaysia's educational and employment frameworks. This migration trend is not merely a search for opportunities but a pursuit of impartial representation and equal chances in education and work, significantly influenced by the historical British imperial imprint on Malaysia that has guided their destination choices for relocation and settlement. Despite prolonged residence in the host country, these Malaysians exhibit an "enigmatic sense of loyalty towards their homeland" (cited in section 3.3.4 - Francis-Granger, 2023: 100), expressing an entrenched sense of Malaysian identity and a persistent longing for their native culture, cuisine, and community. One cannot return home because Malaysia has become unrecognisable, yet the 'birth home'—*tanah air*—cannot be relinquished. The idea of renouncing 'home' is inconceivable as it is an integral part of one's identity and the place where

one's being came to be shaped. This enduring allegiance to Malaysia, amidst their integration efforts in the United Kingdom, hints at a profound loyalty transcending the adversities that originally compelled their migration. Such a strong bond with their roots, juxtaposed with life in the United Kingdom, calls attention to a complex identity dynamic that is marked by a continuous negotiation between their Malaysian heritage and their experiences abroad.

This research has greatly delved into the Malaysians' experiences in the United Kingdom, revealing how the persistent echoes of racial ideologies from their homeland influence their sense of belonging and their strategies for finding a voice in a foreign land. While they may have adopted certain aspects of their host country, such as a British Asian identity, Asian identity or a British accent, their inherent Malaysian identity remains indelible. This suggests an identity that has undergone a level of amalgamation, hyphenation, hybridisation and diversification, reflecting the worldwide dispersion of the Malaysian diaspora. Thus, this diaspora epitomises the unification of migration, identity, and transnational ties, enriching the discourse in diaspora and cultural studies by offering deep reflections on the processes of identity transformation amidst the complexities of migration and globalisation. In this context, the nuanced experiences of the Malaysian diaspora in the United Kingdom are a vivid illustration of the oscillation between visibility and invisibility that shapes their daily lives and identities. On one hand, they are conspicuously visible as part of the broader Asian demographic, yet on the other, there is a distinct invisibility that cloaks their specific Malaysian heritage. This duality creates a layered experience of identity and belonging, insofar that it further highlights the complexities of their diasporic journey.

Perception of others: *Visibility* and *Invisibility* of the Malaysian diaspora

One of the major discoveries I garnered through my data analysis pertains to the paradox between the *visibility* and *invisibility* aspects of the Malaysian diaspora. In my article, *The Representation Crisis: the Underrepresented Malaysian Ethnic Minorities* (2023), I discuss the concept of invisibility, referring to the underrepresentation of Malaysians in both Malaysia and the United Kingdom. My analysis now extends this idea, exploring invisibility as it pertains to Malaysians being conflated with other Asian ethnic minorities, such as the Chinese and Indian communities. The existential dimension of the self, as it exists within the lifeworld, has a profound influence on how individuals present and perceive themselves when they enter a new environment (Dolezal, 2012). The initial interactions in this unfamiliar setting are primarily facilitated through the body, making individuals vulnerable to the judgments of others. These

judgments can lead to a variety of self-revelations or concealments, whether intentional or subconscious. The way individuals express their identities—whether as a visible minority, as Chinese, Indians or Asian descent—illustrates the crucial role of the gaze of others in shaping the impressions they project and perceive in their new social context. This interaction echoes the relational aspect of the lifeworld, emphasising that lived experiences are inherently relational, with individuals constantly interpreting their identities in relation to those they encounter (Dolezal, 2012).

In the broader context of British society, Malaysians often find themselves misidentified, not due to obscurity, but through a misclassification that merges their identity with those of more prominent Asian communities, like the Indian or Chinese diasporas. This misperception is not so much about a lack of prominence, but rather a misclassification where the unique cultural nuances that characterise Malaysian identity are overshadowed by the dominant narratives associated with other Asian groups. This form of *invisibility* is indicative of the diaspora experience where identity is not merely about being seen, but also about being understood within one's full cultural and national context. Within the diasporic communities themselves, Malaysians navigate a complicated space. They find a semblance of cultural familiarity and community within the Chinese, Indian, Indonesian or Muslim communities in the United Kingdom. However, even within these communities, their specific Malaysian identity can be eclipsed by the broader ethnocultural identities. Interestingly, the Chinese and Indian communities can differentiate the Chinese and Indian Malaysians due to their distinct accent, language, and lifestyle, allowing for a nuanced form of *visibility* within these communities. They are visible as ethnic minorities in the eyes of British society. Despite their efforts to assimilate and integrate into society, Malaysians remain conflated within the Indian and Chinese communities. This paradoxical experience of *visibility* and *invisibility* addresses a deeper yearning for recognition and knowledge, with a desire to be seen not just as part of a broader ethnic group, but as individuals representing a rich, distinct cultural heritage and story. This dichotomy between *visibility* and *invisibility* speaks volumes about their quest for identity affirmation in a multicultural context in that it highlights the complexities of diaspora identity dynamics in a globalised world.

The phenomenon of invisibility permeates social interactions, manifesting in the rarity with which Malaysians are acknowledged or inquired about their nationality in everyday conversations. To put it differently, the query "Are you Malaysian?" is seldom posed, asserting a subtle form of invisibility where their national identity remains unacknowledged or

unrecognised in various social contexts. In the context of identity formation and cultural assimilation, it is observed that a majority of Malaysians do not actively contemplate their ancestral origins, primarily due to the fact that they, along with their immediate families, were born and raised in Malaysia. This self-perception is predominantly unchallenged until they experience migration. Upon relocation, when inquiries about their ethnic background arise or assumptions are made about their origins being from China, India or other surrounding countries, they find themselves reflecting and articulating their historical lineage and cultural heritage, a topic they had not previously explored in depth while in Malaysia. This prompts a newfound introspection into their ancestral trajectory and personal identity. The scant recognition of their Malaysian identity can foster a feeling of erasure among Malaysians abroad, where their unique ethnocultural identity is often subsumed under more generic Asian classifications—a misconception or assumption of what a Malaysian really is. In my view, this phenomenon could have potentially impelled non-Malay Malaysians living abroad to distance themselves from national identification and gravitate towards a more primordial one, such as ethnocultural identity in favour of a broader collective ethnocultural identity. This misperception or misclassification within a diverse society might lead them to accept the perceived categorisation rather than having to repeatedly explain their identity and background to others. This experience can lead to a form of identity dilution that prompts some Malaysians to seek solace and solidarity by aligning more closely with their ethnocultural roots. In doing so, they may embrace a more pronounced identification with the broader Asian diaspora, finding camaraderie and a sense of belonging in the shared traditions, beliefs, and practices—attempts to fit in the broader space. However, this alignment with broader ethnocultural identities does not fully satiate the desire for a distinct Malaysian recognition. Malaysia's vibrant cultures, often described as a mosaic or "Little Asia" (my quote, see 2.2.1), represent a blend of cultures from surrounding countries, forming a unique mosaic of Asia that Malaysians abroad strive to maintain and celebrate. This adaptation serves as a survival strategy, enabling Malaysians to navigate and establish their place within the multicultural fabric of their host societies, all while preserving their heritage.

The endeavours of Malaysians to preserve their unique identity are particularly evident in their celebration of Malaysian cuisine and cultural practices, showcasing a profound commitment to sustaining and giving prominence to their cultural legacy. In the context of the diaspora, cuisine evolves beyond its basic function of nourishment to embody a profound symbol of cultural identity and differentiation. The intricate fusion of flavours and diverse

influences that define Malaysian cuisine serves not merely as culinary delights but as assertive declarations of their distinct heritage, effectively distinguishing them from other Asian diasporic groups. This food identity is not a trivial aspect of their diasporic existence but a core element of their cultural expression that enables Malaysians to assert their nationality and cultural uniqueness. Malaysian cuisine appears to define who they are as Malaysians. The act of preparing, sharing, and celebrating Malaysian food becomes a ritualistic reaffirmation of their roots that provides a tangible connection to their homeland and a clear demarcation of their identity amidst a mosaic of other ethnic minorities. Moreover, the strong inclination among Malaysians to identify closely with their national origin, especially through culinary traditions, punctuates a collective effort to maintain a distinct 'us' versus 'others' dynamic. This dynamic is not rooted in divisiveness but in a desire to celebrate and preserve the unique aspects of their culture—a 'true identity'—that might otherwise be overshadowed in the broader diasporic experience. Beyond cuisine, traits like hard work and reliability are celebrated as more than mere personal virtues; they are emblematic of the Malaysian ethos, imbuing these characteristics with a cultural significance that transcends individual achievement. In their host communities, Malaysians are thus perceived not only as individuals but as representatives of a culture that values skill, dedication, and trustworthiness. These attributes contribute to a broader narrative, portraying Malaysians as integral and valuable contributors to the societal and cultural fabric of their diasporic homes, which further enrich the multicultural landscapes they inhabit—attempts to belong.

Despite their concerted efforts to assimilate and integrate into their host and ethnocultural communities, many Malaysians in the United Kingdom find themselves grappling with an identity crisis, oscillating between maintaining their Malaysian roots in trying to stay true to their identity, and navigating the broader identities that are often imposed upon them. This identity conundrum signifies a profound yearning among the Malaysian diaspora to affirm their national identity, seeking recognition and appreciation for their distinct cultural heritage and desiring to make a meaningful contribution to the diverse mosaic of the host's multicultural landscape. This quest for identity affirmation is further intensified by the relatively small size of the Malaysian community, which fosters a sense of solidarity and patriotism among its members. In a bid to distinguish themselves—to stand out—the Malaysian diaspora is driven to establish a distinct presence, aspiring to be visible and dynamic contributors not only within their immediate communities but also in the wider context of diaspora and ethnocultural identity discussions. They aim to carve out a space for themselves where their existence, or

Hall's "being", is recognised, their voices are heard, their culture is celebrated, and their contributions are acknowledged, thereby enriching the multicultural narrative of the United Kingdom.

Sense of belonging: A basic human need

The sense of belonging, a fundamental human need situated prominently within Maslow's hierarchy, plays a critical role in shaping the identities and experiences of the Malaysian diaspora. This need for belonging and the accompanying quest for identity are not uniform; they are deeply influenced by a myriad of sociocultural, historical, and personal factors that vary across different ethnic groups within the Malaysian community. Hirsch poignantly articulates that "belonging is a foundational human need" (2018: 22), underscoring the human yearning to be part of something greater than oneself. This sense of belonging, often imagined, serves as a vital psychological anchor, providing individuals with a sense of identity, purpose, and community (Anderson, 1983). It is through this imagined sense of belonging that individuals forge connections, not only with the tangible world around them but also with the broader narratives and communities they envision themselves to be part of, shaping their identity and place in the world.

The enigmatic sense of belonging and the nuanced question of loyalty vary significantly among ethnic immigrants within the Malaysian community, reflecting complex identities and affiliations. This variation illuminates the characteristics of belonging where individual experiences, cultural backgrounds, and personal narratives shape distinct loyalties and senses of community. Within this diverse group, the notion of belonging transcends mere physical or geographical ties. It evolves into a profound exploration of identity in which loyalty to one's heritage, new homeland, or a blend of both—"becoming" a "Third Space" is a personal journey that has been influenced by a myriad of factors unique to each individual's lived experience (Hall, 1990; Bhabha, 1994). In my findings, for Indian Malaysians in the United Kingdom, the sense of belonging and loyalty to their homeland are unfathomable, with a tendency toward more fluid ethnic, cultural and national identities. This inclination could be partly attributed to historical factors, such as the migration patterns under British colonial rule, which positioned Indian immigrants in Malaysia in a certain socioeconomic and cultural context. Another attribute influencing the sense of belonging and loyalty among Malaysian immigrants could be their rejection of their birth country, particularly in response to ethnocentric policies that have disadvantaged certain populations in critical areas such as education, employment, and

landownership. This disenchantment may stem from perceived systemic inequities or a sense of marginalisation, prompting individuals to seek a sense of belonging and acknowledgment elsewhere. Such experiences can significantly shape their identity and allegiance. The relatively smaller population of Indian Malaysians may indeed influence their readiness to integrate or adopt new identities in the host country. This demographic factor might facilitate a smoother transition for them to align with the broader Indian diaspora or even the British national identity, leveraging shared cultural or historical ties. Being part of a smaller group can sometimes intensify the need for community and connection, leading Indian Malaysians to seek out and embrace larger, more established groups where they find resonances of their own cultural practices or values. This inclination to integrate or identify with broader communities can be a pragmatic approach to finding solidarity and support in a new environment, especially when direct ties to their specific Indian-Malaysian heritage are less visible or accessible in their new surroundings.

In contrast, according to my findings, the Chinese Malaysian community's loyalty to Malaysia often manifests more distinctly compared to the Indian or mixed-ethnic groups, with a pronounced tendency among many individuals to either contemplate returning or to sustain strong ties with their homeland. This sense of allegiance is possibly rooted in their notable demographic presence in Malaysia, which not only provides a sense of solidarity but also a shared communal identity, deeply intertwined with a history of migration and collective experiences of settlement in Malaysia. These shared historical narratives and cultural memories reinforce their sense of belonging and dedication to the Malaysian nation, even as they navigate their ethnic identity within a sociopolitical landscape dominated by the Malay majority. This profound connection to Malaysia among Chinese Malaysians may also be viewed as a response to ethnic dynamics within the nation, where the Chinese population has continuously engaged in a process of asserting their place and rights. Historically, the Chinese in Malaysia have had to navigate a complex web of social, political, and cultural negotiations to secure and affirm their status and identity within a diverse yet stratified society, a phenomenon referred to as "healthy patriotism" by Ratnam (2019: 5, explored in section 5.3.5). Such a backdrop of historical engagement with issues of recognition and rights could foster a sense of community and national identity among Chinese Malaysians, profoundly influencing how they perceive themselves and their place in the world, both within and outside Malaysia. Consequently, when Chinese Malaysians find themselves in diasporic contexts, these ingrained perceptions of identity and belonging, shaped by their historical and demographic realities back home,

significantly influence their interactions with the host country. Their experiences of identity, loyalty, and community are not isolated from their past but are continually informed by their historical narratives and the ongoing dialogue with their Malaysian heritage—"the past continues to speak" (Hall, 1990: 226) and "not to be forgotten, but to be built upon" (Kapur-Dromson, 2007: preface x). These factors distinctly shape the Malaysian-Chinese diaspora's engagement with critical questions of loyalty, identity, and belonging, exemplifying a unique transnational experience that intertwines their past, present, and future across different cultural and national landscapes.

The notion of belonging transcends beyond personal and communal identities, embracing wider societal and environmental issues. The Malaysian diaspora, with its diverse backgrounds, comes together around shared objectives—be it the nation's survival or addressing global ecological challenges. This unity reflects a form of belonging that exceeds the usual confines of ethnicity or nationality, advocating for a global, humanistic perspective that emphasises collective action and mutual responsibility. The call to action is to look beyond distinctions such as colour, race, prejudice, and social status, and to collaborate as a united human race in addressing ecological concerns. This collective approach not only fosters a sense of global solidarity but also highlights the interdependence of humans and the environment, underscoring the critical role of shared responsibility in the collective well-being and survival. Furthermore, the strong sense of identity among Malaysians becomes particularly pronounced when they are abroad, especially during interactions with fellow Malaysians. Such encounters often ignite feelings of nostalgia and patriotism, reinforcing their true, shared identity and connection to their homeland. This phenomenon illustrates how shared challenges and common goals can foster a sense of unity and collective purpose, even in diverse and dispersed communities like the Malaysian diaspora and between individual and collective identities in the context of global citizenship and environmental responsibility.

In addition, the geographical distribution of the Malaysian community across the United Kingdom markedly shapes their sense of belonging. Given the relatively modest size of the Malaysian population in the host country, predominantly scattered across major cities, individuals frequently encounter challenges in connecting with fellow Malaysians. Despite their concentration in urban areas, the dispersion within these areas can make it difficult for Malaysians to find a sense of community with others from their homeland, which challenges fostering connections within the diaspora. This dispersion prompts Malaysians to forge connections with members of other immigrant communities, boosting a sense of belonging in

a diverse yet unified context. Such interactions not only facilitate a broader sense of community but also demonstrate the adaptability and openness of Malaysians in building bridges with varied cultural groups, thereby enriching their experience of belonging in a multicultural setting. In cosmopolitan hubs such as London, the multicultural environment offers an ideal setting for nurturing and celebrating a distinct Malaysian identity within a diverse cultural mosaic. In these settings, the impetus to conform to the dominant culture is less intense, enabling Malaysians to express their cultural heritage more vividly and authentically. Conversely, for Malaysians residing outside these multicultural hubs, the situation often differs significantly. There, the drive towards assimilation can be more compelling as individuals may feel a greater need to blend in with the predominant community or align with other well-established diaspora groups in order to champion a sense of belonging and connection.

The exploration of the Malaysian diaspora's journey in the United Kingdom is a narrative that delves into identity, cultural integration, and the nuances of assimilation within the context of British society. This narrative unfolds against a backdrop of historical ties, shaped by Malaysia's colonial past with Britain, and evolves through the personal and collective experiences of Malaysians navigating their place in a culturally diverse host country. At the heart of this transition is the interaction between maintaining a distinct Malaysian identity and integrating into British society. The process of becoming involves not just a superficial adoption of British customs but a negotiation of identity where individuals balance the retention of their Malaysian heritage with the embrace of British values and norms. English language proficiency emerges as a crucial element in this integration process, serving as a gateway to broader societal participation and acceptance. However, the journey is not merely about individual adaptation. Community structures, such as Malaysian associations and the High Commission in London provide a sense of belonging and cultural continuity. These entities act as cultural anchors, offering in-between and third spaces for Malaysians to connect with their roots while navigating their new British identities (Bhabha, 1994).

The discourse around multiculturalism in the United Kingdom, especially in the context of Malaysian integration, is dynamic and ongoing. The debate oscillates between celebrating diversity and grappling with the challenges of fostering a cohesive society where multiple cultures coexist and enrich the national fabric. The prevailing sentiment among the Malaysian community suggests that while strides are being made towards fostering "a stronger common sense of Britishness" that discourages "parallel lives", as advocated by IPPR, there remains a considerable journey ahead (Cooper & Lodge, 2008: 13). The Brexit referendum has

introduced a significant layer of complexity to the experiences of the Malaysian diaspora, intertwining with their journey of cultural integration and identity negotiation. The decision to leave the EU has not only dramatically transformed the British political and economic landscape but has also left a profound impact on the Malaysian community's perceptions and lived experiences. This period of change has sparked varied reactions among Malaysians, mirroring the broader national divide between Leave and Remain supporters. Among the Malaysian diaspora, there are nuanced distinctions in attitudes towards Brexit. Some Malaysians, particularly those who have attained a comfortable socioeconomic status, supported Brexit with the aspiration of preserving their financial well-being, influenced by the prospect of reduced taxation and a perceived regain of economic sovereignty. This group views Brexit as an opportunity to prioritise Commonwealth citizens, potentially enhancing job opportunities by reducing competition with EU nationals and distancing the United Kingdom from EU regulations, such as those impacting religious expressions—a point of contention illustrated by France's laws on religious symbols. Conversely, other members of the Malaysian community, who favoured remaining in the EU, express concerns about their apprehensions about the unknowns and possible detachment stemming from Brexit. They are concerned about its wider effects on multiculturalism and integration, pondering the repercussions of the shift in immigration policies and international collaboration on the nation's cultural mosaic and their role within it. For some, there is a palpable anxiety regarding their future in the United Kingdom, casting doubt on their prolonged residency and the impact of Brexit on their right to remain. Such concerns, in my opinion, also extend to those who might consider relocating to the United Kingdom, viewing Brexit as a barrier to their potential plans. Thus, Brexit has become a factor in the ongoing discourse surrounding identity, belonging, and multiculturalism for Malaysians in the United Kingdom. It has stirred a spectrum of perspectives with reflections on individual experiences and broader societal debates, and continues to shape the narrative of integration and cultural negotiation within the Malaysian diaspora in post-Brexit Britain.

Loyalty to homeland: An enigma.

The notion of loyalty to one's homeland within the context of the Malaysian diaspora in the United Kingdom is a nuanced phenomenon that is interlaced with nostalgia, patriotism, identity, sense of belonging and migratory experiences. Thus, this loyalty is not an isolated sentiment; rather, it is shaped by a confluence of factors including the ways different ethnocultural groups navigate and adapt to their new environments post-migration. As Ratnam has suggested (in section 5.3.1), identity connects with citizenship, state authority, and expected

loyalty, which are influenced by ethnic and religious factors, affecting personal and national identities. The adaptation process is often a transformative experience, where migrants' ethnocultural identities are layered onto their new national identities, sometimes enhancing their societal recognition, and altering their self-perception in the host country. The findings from this research have yielded some important points regarding the ethnicity of the participants in my research and its critical role in shaping the diasporic experience and, by extension, loyalty to the homeland.

Although the aspect of seeking community and representation has been touched upon earlier, it is imperative to underline its significance for Indian Malaysians and migration. This quest for a sense of belonging and visibility is not just a peripheral consideration but a prevailing and dominant factor in their decision-making process. The feeling of alienation or marginalisation in Malaysia, juxtaposed with the potential for better inclusion and acceptance in the United Kingdom, cannot be overstated in its impact on their migration choices. For Indian Malaysians, the allure of the United Kingdom goes beyond just economic opportunities; it extends to social and cultural affinity. The established South Asian communities in the United Kingdom provide not just a network but a mirror of their own cultural heritage, offering a semblance of 'home away from home'. This cultural and social resonance is a powerful magnet, drawing them towards countries where they feel they can reclaim a sense of identity and representation that may feel diluted or absent in their homeland. In this light, the emphasis on community and representation warrants reinforcement, as many Indian Malaysians view their potential migration not just as an initial decision to move but also as a source of long-term loyalty and a sense of belonging in their new country.

The paradoxical shift in loyalties, from homeland to a new host land, emerges as a striking revelation in this research, especially when juxtaposed against the loyalty dynamics observed among Malay Malaysians. Chinese and Indian Malaysians, shaped by a legacy of labour migration and sociopolitical marginalisation, often experience a different set of sentiments, with migration being an integral part of their historical and cultural identity. For them, the experience of migration is woven into their historical narrative and identity. This enduring sense of mobility and displacement can lead to feelings similar to those experienced by newer generations of other diasporas, who navigate complex identities and affiliations shaped by their migratory histories. These communities often grapple with dual identities, balancing their cultural heritage with the realities of their current sociopolitical environment. Indian Malaysians in particular, this transition from an inherent loyalty to their place of birth

to an evolving allegiance to their new country of residence symbolises a profound identity transformation. Initially, loyalty lies inherently with Malaysia, the nation where they were born and raised. Yet, the migration journey instigates a nuanced evolution of allegiance. Upon settling in a new country, such as the United Kingdom, what begins as a host land gradually transforms into their 'new homeland'. This transformation is not merely about geographic relocation but signifies a deep, personal redefinition of 'home' and 'belonging'. The shift is particularly poignant when considering the contrast with Malay Malaysians, whose loyalty dynamics might differ in Malaysia and abroad. For Indian Malaysians, the transition in loyalty encapsulates a journey of seeking and finding a space where they feel represented, validated, and respected—a journey that culminates in the adoption of their host country as their new homeland. This evolving loyalty reflects more than a change of address; it signifies a reconfiguration of identity, where the new land no longer just offers refuge or opportunity but becomes a core part of their self-definition and community affiliation. This aspect gives a new dimension to my understanding of Ratnam's loyalty to homeland postulation, given that loyalty can shift from primordial bonds to new bonds forged by shared experiences and collective identity. It suggests that allegiance is not static, but evolves with changing personal and societal landscapes. The term 'new homeland' thus encapsulates profound emotional and psychological factors that go beyond the economic, transitioning, and shaping identity, belonging, and loyalty through the migration experiences of this group in a significant way.

In stark contrast to the Indian Malaysians, the loyalty of Malay Malaysians to their homeland is a consequence of their majority status within Malaysia whereby they benefit from certain privileges and rights. As the predominant ethnic group, imbued with specific entitlements and a central role in the nation's sociopolitical landscape, Malaysia represents an unambiguous and steadfast home for them. This ingrained sense of belonging is reinforced by the privileges associated with their status, which includes socioeconomic advantages and cultural affirmations that are intrinsic to their identity as Malays in Malaysia. For Malay Malaysians, their majority status is not just a demographic fact but a cornerstone of their national identity and Islamic faith, which is the predominant religion in the country. This intertwining of ethnic and religious identity further solidifies their connection to Malaysia, making it much more than just a place of residence—it is a place where their cultural, religious, and social narratives are rooted within the national fabric. Consequently, when Malay Malaysians move abroad, their loyalty, profound sense of attachment, belonging, and primordial bonds to Malaysia remain strong, often unaltered by their experiences in foreign

lands. The concept of 'home' remains unequivocally tied to Malaysia, a sentiment that is less likely to be redefined by their diaspora experience. This sentiment is reminiscent of the emotional ties felt by first-generation migrants, such as Indians, Pakistanis, and Jamaicans, who moved to the United Kingdom. These individuals often retain a strong connection to their homeland, a sense of identity deeply rooted in their place of origin, and sometimes a persistent longing to return. This strong emotional bond to their homeland may drive Malay Malaysians to express a desire to return to their ancestral roots, reflecting a yearning for a cultural and geographical home that is deeply embedded in their identity. While they might adapt to life in a new country, the sense of Malaysia as their inherent home, infused with specific rights and a unique cultural and religious landscape, maintains a powerful grip on their loyalty and allegiance. This enduring connection to their homeland distinguishes Malay Malaysians from their Indian Malaysian counterparts, whose migration is marked by a search for community and belonging that they find lacking in Malaysia. For Malay Malaysians, the diasporic experience is an extension of their life journey, not a quest for a new homeland. Their sense of identity and allegiance remains firmly anchored in the Malaysian soil, reflecting an enigmatic narrative of national loyalty that persists across borders.

Yet, the notion of belonging remains complex for many within the Malaysian diaspora. Despite concerted efforts to integrate and carve out a niche in their new environment, there exists a pervasive sentiment of impermanence—a lingering impression that their stay in the United Kingdom is ephemeral, akin to residing on what I call *borrowed land*. This feeling transcends the boundaries of legal status or societal acceptance, touching on a profound yearning for a deep-seated connection to a locale that resonates as an unambiguous 'home'. Home is traditionally linked to childhood memories and a sense of belonging, but its allure fades when the physical space or familiar connections are lost—through selling the house, family moving away, or changes over time. When 'home' no longer exists as it once did, the longing diminishes, and returning to what was once home can highlight these changes, impacting one's sense of belonging. Such individuals might grapple with a sense of detachment, feeling that they never truly and fully belonged in Malaysia, perceiving it as a place of provisional attachment. It is about finding a community where they are not just physically located but emotionally and spiritually invested—a place where their history, culture, and personal journeys are recognised, valued, and amalgamated into the social fabric. This ongoing search for a place that truly feels like home speaks volumes about the human desire for connection, acceptance, and a sense of permanence. It reflects a universal quest to

find one's place in the world—a place not just to live, but to belong, to contribute, and to be recognised as an integral part of a community. In their quest to establish roots in the United Kingdom, they confront similar challenges, striving to forge meaningful connections yet feeling anchored in a sense of transience, as if their sense of belonging is perpetually out of grasp, manifested by an enduring sense of living on *borrowed land*. For the Malaysian diaspora in the United Kingdom, this journey is a poignant narrative of navigating between worlds, spaces, cultures, and identities, striving to find a balance between preserving their heritage and embracing a new chapter in a land that is, for now, 'borrowed'.

The United Kingdom's history of tolerance toward diverse peoples and cultures sets a commendable precedent. However, there is a growing call for a shift from mere tolerance to a celebration of various nationalities, aiming to cultivate a broader vision of Britain as "a place, not a race" (Winder, 2005: 476). This evolution from tolerance to celebration is particularly pertinent for the Malaysian diaspora, who navigate the impediments of belonging in a foreign land. While this nation's tolerance provides a foundation for peaceful coexistence, the Malaysian diaspora's experience demonstrates the need for a deeper, more integrative form of acceptance. The sentiment of impermanence and the feeling of living on *borrowed land* that many Malaysians in the United Kingdom experience, exemplify a gap between being tolerated and feeling truly accepted and celebrated. The journey toward feeling at home involves not just legal recognition or superficial acceptance but an embeddedness in the community's social, cultural, and emotional arena. This nuanced understanding of belonging—where individuals are not just acknowledged but valued for their unique contributions and heritage—can transform the notion of the United Kingdom as merely a place of residence into one of genuine home. The endeavour involves the meticulous construction of a society wherein individuals, regardless of their cultural or geographic origins, perceive an inherent sense of belonging within the community. This vision extends beyond mere coexistence to a greater integration in which every member actively contributes to and derives benefits from the community's collective advancement and cultural richness. Therefore, as the United Kingdom continues to navigate its multicultural landscape, the emphasis should shift towards fostering an environment where the Malaysian diaspora, and indeed all communities, do not just exist but thrive. Celebrating each nationality's culture, history, and identity is crucial in shaping a more inclusive and cohesive Britain—a nation that is a mosaic of diverse yet unified individuals, where the concept of home extends beyond physical boundaries to embrace a shared sense of belonging and collective identity.

The quest for identity: Hybrid and progressive.

In concluding my exploration of the thesis's most central themes, I culminate with the quintessential element: identity. Embarking on this project as a contiguous-insider researcher (see 1.5.4), my objective was to delineate Malaysian identity within the diasporic context, inspired by my own quest for identity and a sense of belonging. Initially, my expectations leaned towards a clear-cut, unambiguous categorisation. However, the research journey unveiled a different reality. Engaging with the narratives of participants, I found myself navigating through a labyrinth of perspectives, recognising that a singular, concrete definition was elusive—there is no one single recipe. The essence of my findings revealed that identity is inherently multifaceted, shaped by an amalgamation of influences that render it both complex and fluid, aligning with Hall's and Bhabha's theories. It emerges not as a fixed construct but as a universally constant dynamic phenomenon shaped by an array of factors, continuously evolving and "re-inventing itself" (Jones, 2008: 22). This evolution attests to the nuanced, polyvalent, and progressive nature of identity wherein its formation is a process influenced by diverse elements in shaping how individuals perceive themselves and how they are perceived by others.

At the core of identity exploration is the understanding that individuals develop a primary or master identity—their true identity—primarily influenced by their early familial environment and the cultural settings they initially engage with. This core identity serves as the foundational aspect of their self-conception, providing a stable base from which other aspects of self can emerge and grow. Over time, individuals accumulate secondary identities that are not mere additions but are essential in providing a more comprehensive understanding of oneself. These secondary identities contribute significantly to one's overall identity, yielding layers of complexity and depth that enhance personal understanding. These layers are not randomly acquired; they are deeply rooted in the traditions of one's family, the expectations of society, and the cultural practices one engages with. They are expressed through the language individuals speak, the customs they practice, the religious doctrines they adhere to, and the sense of national identity they possess. Each of these elements is paramount in shaping how individuals see themselves and how they are perceived by others. The formation of identity is a continuous process, akin to an ongoing journey of self-discovery and adaptation, influenced by a broad range of external factors—a "process of social conditioning" (Afua, 2018: 22). These factors work together to shape and refine an individual's identity over time, much like how a sculptor shapes a piece of art. The result is a dynamic, evolving sense of self that adapts

and changes in response to new experiences and insights. In this context, the study of identity delves into how the initial, core identity interacts with and is influenced by the accumulation of secondary identities over a person's lifetime. Coulmas aptly captures this process:

> Individual identities are complex structures combining inherited features with various group memberships, loyalties, values, belief systems, and fashions. These structures adjust to changing circumstances and so does the concept of identity itself. Elements may be discarded or remixed, new ones added on occasion. Hence a definitive definition is not available. (2019: 144)

This statement highlights that identity is a living, breathing entity, subject to change and reconfiguration, influenced by a web of relationships, experiences, and societal dynamics. This view challenges any attempt to oversimplify identity, advocating instead for an appreciation of its polygonal and ever-evolving nature. This exploration reveals a complex but coherent structure of identity, where the primary and secondary aspects are interlinked, each shaped by diverse influences from one's family, society, and cultural background.

Additionally, the particular context or environment in which an individual is situated shapes which aspects of their identity become more prominent at any given time. Individuals may navigate and exhibit dual or multiple identities, adapting and shifting based on the social group they are interacting with or the specific setting they find themselves in. This adaptability underlines the versatility of identity and its capacity to be continually reshaped and redefined according to varying contexts. For example, a person might display different facets of their identity when they are at work compared to when they are with family or friends. In professional settings, certain aspects of one's identity, such as expertise and work ethic, might be foregrounded, while in a familial or social setting, other characteristics, such as cultural heritage or personal hobbies, may come to the fore. This ability to navigate between different identities based on context demonstrates the shifting nature of identity—it is not fixed but is an ever-evolving construct that responds to and reflects the complexities of various social environments. Understanding this fluid nature of identity helps in recognising that individuals are not bound by a single, unchanging sense of self. Instead, they possess the ability to adapt and mould their identity based on the demands and nuances of different social interactions and environments.

In Malaysia, the landscape of identity is linked with the structures of ethnic categorisation, which significantly influence how individuals perceive and articulate their

identities. The country's sociopolitical environment, marked by a pronounced emphasis on ethnic distinctions, often encourages non-Malay communities to place greater importance on their ethnocultural identities than on a collective national identity. This phenomenon is not merely a personal choice but a response to the broader sociopolitical dynamics that stress ethnic differentiation as a critical determinant of social standing, opportunities, and rights. The inclination for non-Malays to prioritise their ethnocultural identity over a national one can be understood as a strategic form of resistance or a rejection of a status quo that they perceive to marginalise them based on ethnic lines. This response is a testament to the power of identity as a form of assertion against perceived injustices and biases. By emphasising their unique ethnocultural heritage, individuals not only affirm their distinctiveness but also challenge the prevailing narratives and policies that they perceive as unfair or discriminatory. This reveals a conundrum between individual identity formation and the overarching national ethos, and how identities are not static or isolated constructs but are actively shaped and reshaped in dialogue with the surrounding sociopolitical realities. For many non-Malays in Malaysia, asserting their ethnocultural identity becomes a means of articulating their grievances, asserting their rights, and maintaining a sense of dignity and self-respect in a context that they perceive as inequitable. Thus, the phenomenon in Malaysia offers a case study of how sociopolitical forces and identity are mutually constitutive, with individuals navigating and negotiating their identities in ways that both reflect and challenge the larger sociopolitical narratives.

The phenomenon of hybridised identity becomes particularly salient within diasporic communities that embody various degrees of cultural integration and adaptation. For Malaysians residing abroad, the experience of hybridity is characterised by a nuanced spectrum of cultural amalgamation, rather than a straightforward or absolute merger. This condition of hybrid identity reflects a dynamic intermingling of cultural elements from their homeland with those encountered in the new environment. It represents a continuum of integration where the fusion of cultures might not be complete or uniform but exists in varying degrees of synthesis—exemplifying cultural hybridity. For some, this hybrid state might resemble an equilibrium, blending roughly equal parts of their original and adopted cultures; for others, it might manifest as a more dominant influence of one culture over the other, depending on personal experiences, social contexts, and individual choices. This notion of hybridity extends beyond simple cultural hybridity; it is deeply intertwined with feelings of loyalty and connection to one's homeland. Despite the geographical distances and the evolving nature of their identities, many diasporic Malaysians maintain a profound and enduring bond with their place of origin. This connection

is not merely nostalgic but actively influences how they circumnavigate their complex identities, embodying a conscious negotiation between maintaining cultural heritage and adapting to new influences. Such loyalty can be expressed in diverse ways, from continuing traditional practices and celebrations to preserving the language, thereby serving as a fundamental mechanism through which individuals assert their identity amidst the backdrop of a new cultural landscape. Moreover, this enduring allegiance to one's homeland appears vital in the identity politics of diasporic communities, shaping not just personal identities but also the collective identity of the diaspora as a whole. It acts as a counterbalance to the forces of assimilation, ensuring the persistence of a distinct cultural identity that honours its roots while engaging with the new environment. Through this delicate balance, the hybrid identity of diasporic Malaysians emerges as a fluid, ever-evolving construct, reflective of a broader dialogue between the past and the present, the local and the global. This discourse demonstrates the complexity of diasporic identity, and how it is continually reshaped by memory, loyalty, and the lived experiences of navigating between home and cultures.

To conclude, my analysis has been enriched by the application of theories from esteemed scholars like Stuart Hall, Homi Bhabha, and K.J. Ratnam, whose works have been particularly enlightening. Their frameworks have proven invaluable, guiding my interpretation and offering a robust theoretical foundation for my findings. Additionally, I have integrated my own interpretations using an interpretivist framework, which I believe are particularly pertinent and add unique value to the discourse. This study, being innovative in its focus, could be viewed as an initial foray that lays the groundwork for future scholarly inquiry. The dissertation thus has delved into the specificities of the Malaysian diaspora in the United Kingdom and has brought to light the various reasons driving Malaysians to migrate, particularly the influence of Malaysia's ethnically biased education system and employment landscape. Despite their relocation, these individuals generally exhibit a profound loyalty to Malaysia, which illustrates the dynamic influence of cultural roots and the historical context of British colonialism in Malaysia. Nonetheless, a substantial percentage of the individuals seem satisfied in the United Kingdom. The research employed qualitative interviews to explore the participants' migration motivations, revealing a pursuit of equal opportunities in education and employment, which were significantly shaped by the colonial legacy. The narrative underscored the Malaysians' strong sense of identity and belonging while still maintaining ties to their homeland despite feeling marginalised and seeking a more inclusive representation abroad. The study further explores the visibility and invisibility paradox within the diaspora, illustrating how Malaysians

often find themselves amalgamated with other Asian minorities in the United Kingdom, thus experiencing a nuanced form of recognition and identity negotiation. The phenomenon of invisibility, particularly within the broader Asian diaspora, indicates a desire for distinct cultural acknowledgment, often sought through communal interactions and cultural practices, notably cuisine. The diaspora's sense of belonging and loyalty is dissected, revealing variations across different ethnic groups within the Malaysian community in the United Kingdom, influenced by their experiences and interactions in both their homeland and host land spaces. The narratives capture a collective quest for identity and the evolving nature of diasporic identity, navigating between retaining cultural heritage and adapting to new influences, reflecting a broader dialogue between local and global identities. Ultimately, this dissertation presents a nuanced understanding of the Malaysian diaspora's identity, which is continuously shaped by a confluence of historical, social, and personal factors. It illustrates the ever-changing association between individual and collective identities in the context of diaspora and transnationalism, yielding a profound insight into the interaction between cultural heritage and the realities of life in perhaps a not-so-new land.

Limitations

This dissertation recognises the underlying limitations within its research methodology, which are pivotal for interpreting the study's outcomes and their wider relevance. A primary limitation is the study's dependence on a small group of participants, which restricts the extrapolation of its findings to the entire Malaysian diaspora in the United Kingdom. The small sample size raises questions about the study's representativeness, suggesting that the results might not fully reflect the varied experiences and viewpoints across the larger diaspora community. This limitation highlights the necessity for caution in generalising the conclusions, underscoring the importance of a broader participant base to capture a more comprehensive array of perspectives within the diaspora.

The recruitment strategy, mainly leveraging social media and online platforms, introduces potential biases that could shape the participant profile. This method tends to attract individuals who are internet-savvy, potentially skewing the sample towards a younger demographic or those with certain educational or digital backgrounds. The reliance on digital platforms for recruitment might overlook segments of the diaspora who are less engaged online, such as older individuals or those less inclined to use social media, thus not fully representing the diaspora's diversity. Such a recruitment approach may not have captured the full diversity of the Malaysian diaspora, thereby further limiting the study's demographic inclusiveness.

The gender distribution within the participant pool is another aspect to consider, as the research methodology might have inadvertently favoured the inclusion of more women than men. This gender imbalance is significant because it may influence the research findings, potentially unbalancing the study's insights and their applicability to the entire community being studied. Recognising and addressing this imbalance is crucial for ensuring that the study's conclusions are reflective of the entire diaspora's experiences, not biased toward one gender.

The COVID-19 pandemic's impact, particularly through travel restrictions, severely constrained the study's capacity for a geographically broad and inclusive recruitment effort. These limitations hindered the ability to obtain a diverse sample, especially from individuals living outside easily accessible locations during the pandemic, further affecting the representativeness and depth. The pandemic's influence underlines the need for flexibility and

adaptability in research methodologies, especially in unforeseen circumstances that can significantly impact study execution.

In conclusion, this study has enriched my comprehension of the Malaysian diaspora's experiences in the United Kingdom, despite its limitations. The application of theories from various prominent scholars has provided insightful frameworks that guided my analysis and interpretation, adding depth and theoretical robustness to the findings. My own interpretations, which align with and extend these theories, contribute to a nuanced discourse. As a one-of-its-kind research project on the Malaysian diaspora, this dissertation marks the beginning of a deeper exploration into this subject area— a stepping stone towards setting the stage for future studies. Acknowledging the study's limitations underlines the importance of a cautious approach to its conclusions and highlights the necessity for further research with a more diverse and extensive participant base to build on and refine these initial insights, fostering a more thorough understanding of the diaspora's experiences and complexities.

Directions for future research

As delineated in 1.3, because Malaysia's demographic composition is a dynamic tapestry of cultures, ethnicities, religions, and migration, future research on this nation has the potential to offer a canvas for scholarly inquiry. In my view, this multifaceted demographic landscape is ripe for comprehensive ethnographic study, presenting myriad perspectives and insights that could enrich our comprehension of its intricate social fabric. Exploring further in British studies could be beneficial, which could encompass avenues such as sociology, ethnography, cultural studies, and politics, which are gaining prominence due to their emphasis on ethnographic approaches that aim to go beyond theoretical discussions.

Future research could delve into uncharted areas not extensively covered in the thesis, such as the impact of gender roles, linguistics, collective activities like cultural events or sports, gastronomy, fashion and religious practices of the Malaysian diaspora in the United Kingdom. Investigating how gender roles influence diaspora experiences can reveal the nuances of identity, social integration, and community dynamics. This could include exploring how traditional Malaysian gender norms intersect with those of the host country and how these intersections shape individuals' experiences in areas such as employment, education, and social networking. Furthermore, investigating the experiences of LGBTQ+ individuals within the Malaysian diaspora can provide insights into how sexual orientation and gender identity intersect with cultural and national identity in different host countries. This research can uncover the support structures available to LGBTQ+ diasporic individuals and explore how they negotiate their identities in varying sociocultural landscapes. Moreover, the linguistic aspect of the diaspora experience involves examining how language influences identity, belonging, and communication within and outside the diasporic community. For Malaysians in the United Kingdom and France, this might involve navigating multilingual identities or the impact of language on integration and intergenerational communication within diasporic families.

Exploring the role of collective activities, particularly cultural events or sports, can present findings on how these activities foster community cohesion, provide a sense of belonging, and act as a medium for cultural expression and preservation. Examining how participation in cultural events or sports influences diasporic identity and integration could highlight the potential of these activities to bridge cultural gaps and foster intercultural understanding.

Gastronomy is a significant part of ethnocultural identity and can offer a unique perspective on the diaspora experience. Future research could explore how Malaysian cuisine is maintained, adapted, or hybridised in the diaspora. This could involve investigating the role of food in cultural preservation, the influence of local ingredients and tastes on Malaysian dishes, and the use of food as a means of cultural expression and community bonding. Additionally, the study could examine the presence and perception of Malaysian cuisine in the broader culinary landscape of the host country. The study of fashion within the diaspora could be another area that reveals insights into identity expression, cultural preservation, and integration. Such research could focus on how traditional Malaysian attire is worn and adapted in the diaspora, the influence of host country fashion trends on the diasporic community, and the role of fashion in negotiating a dual cultural identity. This could also extend to the influence of Malaysian fashion on the host country's fashion scene, or vice versa.

Additionally, researching the significance of religious practices among the Malaysian diaspora could uncover how these practices support cultural continuity, influence diasporic community structures, and impact individuals' integration into the broader British society. Understanding the role of religion could also shed light on how diasporic individuals navigate their dual identities and maintain connections with their cultural heritage while adapting to their lives in the host country. These areas of research would not only fill gaps in the current understanding of the Malaysian diaspora in the United Kingdom but also contribute to extensive discussions on migration, identity, and multiculturalism.

Other areas, a comparative analysis between diasporic communities, particularly focusing on Malaysians in the United Kingdom and France, could offer a unique lens to understand the nuances of diaspora experiences in different sociopolitical contexts. In the context of conducting research on Malaysians in France, it might be interesting that I, as an autoethnographer, participate in the process by responding to the qualitative semi-structured questions myself. This approach could facilitate a more comprehensive and introspective understanding of the subject matter. This comparison between the United Kingdom and EU settings allows for an exploration of how national policies, societal attitudes, and historical connections influence the integration, identity formation, and community dynamics of diasporas. In examining the Malaysian diaspora within these two regions, one can delve into the variances in migration patterns, community support systems, and the extent of cultural assimilation or preservation. The United Kingdom, with its historical ties to Malaysia, might present a different landscape of interaction and integration compared to France, where the

Malaysian community may engage differently due to distinct historical relationships and social structures.

Using a combination of quantitative and qualitative research methods could provide a holistic understanding of the diaspora experience. The current research, which utilised qualitative methods, served as an initial exploration of the United Kingdom's relatively small Malaysian diaspora, which is appropriate for the in-depth examination of individual narratives and experiences within this specific community. This approach has provided valuable insights into the nuanced, personal aspects of the diaspora experience. Looking ahead, integrating quantitative methods will be crucial for broadening the scope of this research. Quantitative analysis can provide a macroscopic view, revealing patterns and trends in migration, employment, and other key metrics. This statistical perspective can complement and contextualise the rich, detailed understanding gained from qualitative research, offering a more rounded picture of the diaspora's experiences. However, undertaking such comprehensive research likely requires a collaborative effort. A team of researchers, possibly with diverse expertise in quantitative and qualitative methodologies, would be essential to manage the breadth and depth of the study. This team approach can ensure a robust examination of the diaspora, capturing both the overarching trends and the individual stories that illuminate the lived experiences of the Malaysian community in the United Kingdom, and beyond. This dual approach would not only enrich our understanding of the Malaysian diaspora but also contribute valuable knowledge to the field of diaspora and migration studies, sociology, and cultural studies.

Ultimately, in ten years, re-interviewing Malaysians in the United Kingdom would provide a fascinating perspective on the evolution of their identity and loyalties. This future research would aim to uncover whether Malaysians maintain their loyalty to their homeland, adopt a more hybrid identity blending Malaysian and British elements, or lean towards a stronger British identity, or if they have returned to Malaysia. It would explore the impact of a decade's worth of global and local events on their lives, including political changes in Malaysia and the United Kingdom, socioeconomic shifts, and major global occurrences. By examining differences across generations, the interviews would shed light on how first-generation immigrants' experiences and identities compare with those of the second-generation immigrants/settlers. Such a study would offer a comprehensive view of the evolving state of diasporic identity, personal experiences, global events, and cultural integration through the changing landscape of identity and belonging within the Malaysian diaspora.

In conclusion, Malaysia's diverse demographics offer a rich field for scholarly inquiry, promising to deepen our understanding of its complex societal fabric. Future research should extend beyond the British context to explore the multifaceted experiences of the Malaysian diaspora, including aspects like gender, language, sports, and religion. A comparative analysis between Malaysian diasporas in the United Kingdom, France, and other nations, alongside a mix of quantitative and qualitative methods, will provide a comprehensive view of diasporic life.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Comité d'Ethique de la Recherche

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Montpellier, le 03/02/2022

Secretariat Comité d'éthique
Madame Megi Hoxha
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Tél : +33 4 11 75 71 30

Objet : Avis favorable du Comité d'Ethique de la Recherche, Université Paul Valéry-Montpellier III

à Mme FRANCIS GRANGER,

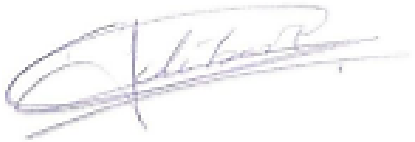
Votre projet de recherche *"Thesis Project ReIdentification, la diaspora malaisienne au Royaume-Uni"* déposé dans sa version initiale le 30 Août 2021 et corrigé dans sa version finale le 25 octobre 2021 (et impliquant comme chercheur titulaire la Pr Motard Anne-Marie) a été débattu au sein de la réunion du Comité d'Éthique de la Recherche du 15 Novembre 2021.

Le comité a émis un avis favorable et l'a inventorié sous le Numéro IRB :
IRB00013307- 2021-11-CER UPVM - Université Paul Valéry - Montpellier III (France) IRB #1

En restant à votre disposition pour tout information complémentaire,

Le Président du comité d'Ethique,

Pr. Daniel GILBERT



Appendix 2: Interview - Information sheet, consent, questionnaire, Google Docs Form and E-mail questionnaire

Introduction and purpose of study

My name is Helena Francis. I am Malaysian and a Ph.D candidate and a member of EMMA (Etudes Montpelliéraines du Monde Anglophone) research centre at the University of Paul-Valéry Montpellier 3 in France. For my thesis project, I am conducting research on Malaysian migration in the United Kingdom. The aim of this research is to examine some of the processes Malaysians who have migrated to the UK go through, and to determine how Malaysian immigrants/settlers integrate themselves (or not), find their own identity and a sense of belonging in another country.

What prompted me to engage in research in this field was the search for my own identity following migration from Malaysia to France nearly 17 years ago. It started during my master's degree, a course related to Britishness and minorities in the UK, which got me questioning the Malaysian immigrants' identity overseas. As I was seeking for papers/books, I noticed a substantial amount of works on other nations, like Jamaica, Pakistan or India, but found a relative lack of scientific literature on Malaysia (or Singapore). As a result, I wrote a research paper for my master's degree on the pursuit of identity and migratory journey of a Malaysian migrant in London. Subsequently, I was approached by my course professor who expressed her interest in supervising a doctoral thesis on the topic, if ever I wished to pursue a Ph.D. Naturally, I jumped at the opportunity! My primary goal is to gather narratives and information, group them up to form qualitative and quantitative data for analyses, which will then contribute to the development of my Ph.D. thesis. In the future, I would like to publish scientific research papers on Malaysians in the UK, possibly extending it to Europe.

Voluntary participation and duration

Your participation is entirely voluntary. The duration of the interview may vary any time between 20 minutes to an hour.

Confidentiality and consent

The information you provide is confidential, except for anonymised direct quotes that may be used in the thesis. Your name or any other personal identifying information will not appear in any publications resulting from this study. This is to ensure your privacy and anonymity. By participating in the interview, you indicate that you understand its purpose and

consent to the use of the data as indicated above. However, if you find some of the questions difficult or sensitive in nature and do not wish to answer a question, feel free to move on to the next one. You have the right to stop the interview at any time. You may also withdraw from the research or modify your answers by contacting me.

If you have any questions regarding this study or would like additional information, please feel free to contact me, either by e-mail helena_fran@yahoo.com or by mobile xx xx x xx xx xx xx.

Thank you for agreeing to participate.

Audio interview

Do I have your permission to interview you for the purpose of my research?

Participant background

1. Tell me about yourself?

   (name, age, where you live now, year of arrival in the UK, current family details, previous professional activity in Malaysia, current professional activity in the UK)

Migratory path

1. What were the reasons for your migration?

   (education/work/spouse/children etc.)

2. How did the UK become your choice of destination for migration? Did you consider other countries?
3. Did language contribute in your decision to migrate to the UK?

   (having learnt English at school? would you have accepted to move to a non-English speaking country? barrier?)

4. What kind of preparation was required for the migration?

   (official/immigration paperwork, fees, English exam, medical exam etc.)

Identity, citizenship and belonging

1. Do you feel Malaysian, British, English, or anything else?

   (hyphenated identity, dual/separate identity.ies)

2. What do you say when asked about where you come from?

   (do you talk about Malaysia?)

3. Do people sometimes see you as a local (British) or a foreigner? How do you feel about the way people see you?

   (have you experienced discrimination/racism)

4. How did you settle in? Did you have any difficulties?

   (a degree of assimilation and/*or integration, culture shock, fashion sense, accent – British, Mixed, Neutral, American)*

5. Do you feel you belong where you live now?

6. *Pre-Covid*. What do you do at the weekends? Do you go out with your friends? What are your hobbies?

   (This question is directed at finding out your circle of friends - British/Asians/mixed, social/sports clubs etc.)

7. How do you feel about your ethnicity and religion? Do they help in defining who you are now? *(insignificant?)*
8. Do you watch political programmes or engage in discussions on politics? Are you involved in politics?

   (Malaysian politics, any thoughts or predictions on Brexit, impact/affected by Brexit, COVID management?)

9. *Pre-Covid*. How do you feel when you return to Malaysia? Have you noticed any difference after your migration?

   (the way people are in Malaysia, social interactions/complexities, mindset? do you miss Malaysia? do you want to return to Malaysia?)

10. After migration, are there habits/trades that you might have retained as a Malaysian?

    (Malaysian food, traditions, heritage, discipline, friendliness, and hospitality that you continue to uphold?)

The future

1. Is your migration in the UK a permanent or a temporary one? Any plans for the future?

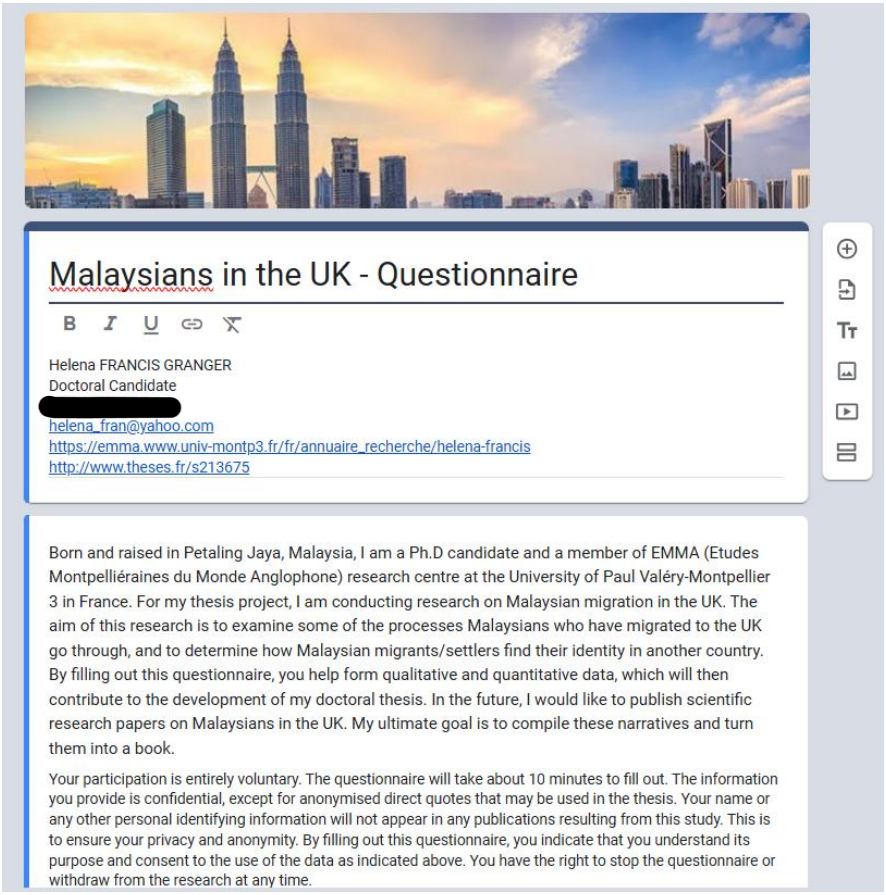
   (hard to foresee the future but… any plans up in the air?) (planning on moving back to Malaysia, retirement?)

Thank you for your time and for answering as honestly as possible. If there is a need for more information or additional interviews, would it be possible to get in touch with you?

Additional information *(Please feel free to share any additional information)*

Feedback *(Please feel free to provide feedback for improvement)*

Google Docs Form
https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSeajUHP5tBt6UhHuZQDHVsp088ydLHnigfSSK0J5Sy_d6w_yw/viewform?usp=sf_link

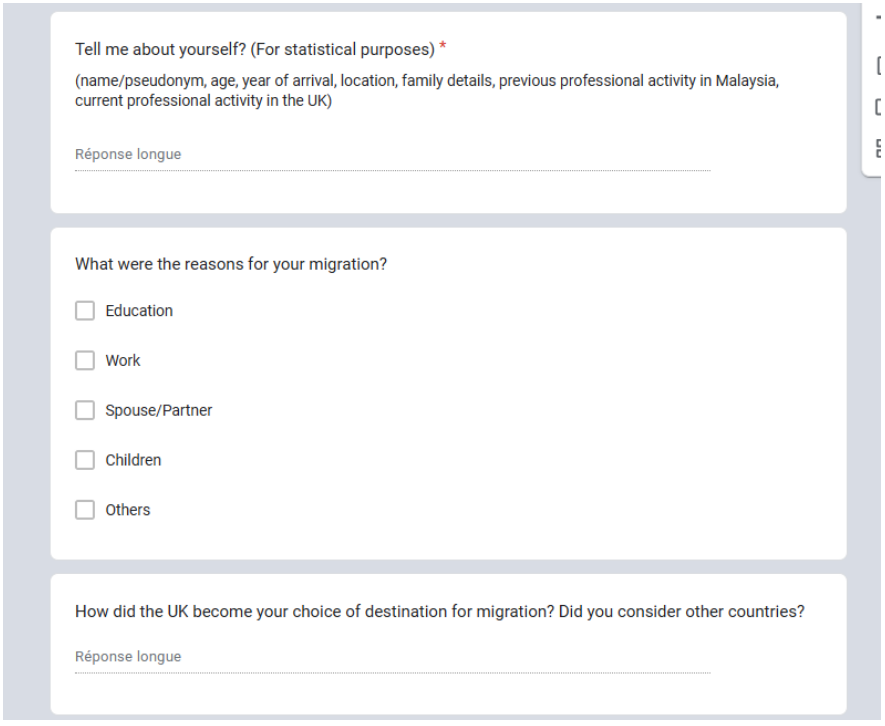


Malaysians in the UK - Questionnaire

Helena FRANCIS GRANGER
Doctoral Candidate
[redacted]
helena_fran@yahoo.com
https://emma.www.univ-montp3.fr/fr/annuaire_recherche/helena-francis
http://www.theses.fr/s213675

Born and raised in Petaling Jaya, Malaysia, I am a Ph.D candidate and a member of EMMA (Etudes Montpelliéraines du Monde Anglophone) research centre at the University of Paul Valéry-Montpellier 3 in France. For my thesis project, I am conducting research on Malaysian migration in the UK. The aim of this research is to examine some of the processes Malaysians who have migrated to the UK go through, and to determine how Malaysian migrants/settlers find their identity in another country. By filling out this questionnaire, you help form qualitative and quantitative data, which will then contribute to the development of my doctoral thesis. In the future, I would like to publish scientific research papers on Malaysians in the UK. My ultimate goal is to compile these narratives and turn them into a book.

Your participation is entirely voluntary. The questionnaire will take about 10 minutes to fill out. The information you provide is confidential, except for anonymised direct quotes that may be used in the thesis. Your name or any other personal identifying information will not appear in any publications resulting from this study. This is to ensure your privacy and anonymity. By filling out this questionnaire, you indicate that you understand its purpose and consent to the use of the data as indicated above. You have the right to stop the questionnaire or withdraw from the research at any time.



Tell me about yourself? (For statistical purposes) *

(name/pseudonym, age, year of arrival, location, family details, previous professional activity in Malaysia, current professional activity in the UK)

Réponse longue

What were the reasons for your migration?

- [ ] Education
- [ ] Work
- [ ] Spouse/Partner
- [ ] Children
- [ ] Others

How did the UK become your choice of destination for migration? Did you consider other countries?

Réponse longue

Did language contribute in your decision to migrate to the UK?
(having learnt English at school? would you have accepted to move to a non-English speaking country?)

Réponse longue

What kind of preparation was required for the migration?
(official/immigration paperwork, fees, English exam, medical exam etc.)

Réponse longue

Do you feel Malaysian, British, English, or anything else?
(hyphenated identity, dual/separate identities)

Réponse longue

What do you say when asked about where you come from?
(do you talk about Malaysia?)

Réponse longue

Do people sometimes see you as a local (British) or a foreigner?

Réponse longue

How do you feel about the way people see you?
(have you experienced discrimination/racism)

Réponse longue

How did you settle in? Did you have any difficulties?
(a degree of assimilation and/or integration, culture shock, accent – British, Mixed, Neutral, American)

Réponse longue

Do you feel you belong where you live now?

Réponse longue

(Pre-Covid) What do you do at the weekends? Do you go out with friends? What are your hobbies?
(This question is directed at finding out your circle of friends, British/Asians/mixed, social/sports clubs etc.)

Réponse longue

How do you feel about your ethnicity and religion? Do they help in defining who you are now?

Réponse longue

Do you watch political programmes or have discussions on politics? Are you involved in politics?

(Malaysian politics, thoughts or predictions on Brexit, affected by Brexit? COVID-19 management?)

Réponse longue

(Pre-Covid) How do you feel when you return to Malaysia? Have you noticed any difference after your migration?

(the way people are in Malaysia - social interactions/complexities, do you miss Malaysia? do you want to return to Malaysia?)

Réponse longue

After migration, are there habits/sentiments that you might have retained as a Malaysian?

(Malaysian food, traditions, heritage, discipline, friendliness and hospitality that you continue to uphold?)

Réponse longue



Is your migration a temporary or a permanent one? Any plans for the future?

(planning on moving back to Malaysia, retirement?)

Réponse longue

E-mail questionnaire

Thesis project ReIdentification

From: Helena Granger (helena_fran@yahoo.com)

To: helena_fran@yahoo.com

Date: Saturday, 6 February 2021 at 02:00 pm GMT+1

Good day,

Please find the details and questionnaire below. I look forward to hearing back from you. :-)

Questionnaire

Introduction and purpose of study

My name is Helena Francis. I am a Ph.D candidate and a member of EMMA (Etudes Montpelliéraines du Monde Anglophone) research centre at the University of Paul Valéry-Montpellier 3 in France. For my thesis project, I am conducting research on Malaysian migration in the UK. The aim of this research is to examine some of the processes Malaysians who have migrated to the UK go through, and to determine how Malaysian migrants/settlers find their identity in another country.

What prompted me to engage in research in this field was the search for my own identity following migration to France nearly 17 years ago. It started during my master's degree, a course related to Britishness and minorities in the UK, which got me questioning the Malaysian migrants' identity overseas. As I was seeking for papers/books, I noticed a substantial amount of works on other nations, like Jamaica, Pakistan or India, but little on Malaysia (or Singapore). As a result, I wrote a research paper for my master's degree on the pursuit of identity and migratory journey of a Malaysian migrant in London. Subsequently, I was approached by my course professor who expressed her interest in supervising a doctoral thesis on the topic, if ever I wished to pursue a Ph.D. Naturally, I jumped at the opportunity! My primary goal is to gather narratives and information, group them up to form qualitative and quantitative data for analyses, which will then contribute to the development of my Ph.D thesis. In the future, I would like to publish scientific research papers on Malaysians in the UK, possibly extending it to Europe. My ultimate goal is to compile these narratives and turn them into a book.

Voluntary participation and duration

Your participation is entirely voluntary. The questionnaire contains 19 questions and will take approximately 20 minutes to fill in.

Confidentiality and consent

The information you provide is confidential, except for anonymised direct quotes that may be used in the thesis. Your name or any other personal identifying information will not appear in any publications resulting from this study. This is to ensure your privacy and anonymity. By filling in this questionnaire, you indicate that you understand its purpose and consent to the use of the data as indicated above. However, if you find some of the questions difficult or sensitive in nature and do not wish to answer a question, feel free to skip it and go to the next one.
Participant name : (optional, pseudonym)
Participant contact : (e-mail/mobile)

If you have any questions regarding this study or would like additional information, please feel free to contact me, either by e-mail helena_fran@yahoo.com or by mobile[redacted].

Participant background

1. Could you tell me a bit about yourself?
(name/age/family details, previous professional activity in Malaysia, current professional activity in England, year of arrival and duration in the UK England)

Migratory path

1. What were the reasons for your migration?
(education/work/spouse/children etc.)

2. How did the UK become your choice of destination for migration? Were other countries considered?

3. Has language played a part in the decision to migrate to the UK?

4. What kind of preparation/process was required for the migration?
(English test, official/immigration paperwork etc.)

5. Is your migration a permanent/temporary one?

Identity, citizenship and belonging

1. Do you feel Malaysian, British, English, or anything else?
(hyphenated identity, dual/separate identities)

2. What do you say when asked about where you come from?

3. Do people sometimes see you as a local (British) or an immigrant?

4. How do you feel about the way people see you?
(have you experienced any discriminations/racism)

5. How did you settle in? Did you have any difficulties?
(any degree of assimilation and/or integration, British accent)

6. Do you feel you belong where you live now?

7. What do you do at the weekends? Do you go out with your friends? What are your hobbies?
(circle of friends, British/Asian/Mixed, social clubs etc.)

8. How do you feel about your ethnicity and religion? Do they help in defining who you are now?

9. Are you involved in politics? Do you watch political programs or have discussions on politics with your family and friends?
(politics in Malaysia, any thoughts or predictions on Brexit etc.)

10. How do you feel when you return to Malaysia? Is there a difference now after your migration?
(do you miss Malaysia? do you want to return to Malaysia?)

11. After migration, are there elements/sentiments that you might have retained as a Malaysian?
(food, hospitality?)

The future

1. What encourages/inspires you to stay on in the UK?

2. Where do you see yourself in the future?

Thank you for your time and for answering as honestly as possible. If there is a need for more information, would it be possible to get in touch with you?

Additional information (Please feel free to share any additional information)

Feedback (Please feel free to provide feedback for improvement)

Best regards,

Helena FRANCIS GRANGER
[redacted]
Doctorante (Ph.D candidate) d'EMMA
Etudes Montpelliéraines du Monde Anglophone - EA741
https://emma.www.univ-montp3.fr/fr/annuaire_recherche/helena-francis

Appendix 3: Participants' profile

No.	Pseudo	Origins: -Malaysian	Gender	Year of arrival	Location	Reason for migration	Occupation
1	E01	Malay	Female	1992	Central	Education	Unassigned
2	E02	Indian	Female	1987	Central	Education	Business owner
3	E03	Indian	Female	2005	Central	Followed spouse/partner	Preschool deputy leader
4	E04	Indian	Female	1997	Central	Education	Unemployed
5	E05	Mixed	Female	2000	Central	Education	Business owner
6	E06	Thai	Female	2016	North	Education	Travel coordinator
7	E07	Malay	Female	1979	Central	Followed spouse/partner	Journalist
8	E08	Indian	Female	2016	Central	Followed spouse/partner	Homemaker
9	E09	Indian	Female	1981	Central	Followed spouse/partner	Freelance florist
10	E10	Malay/Indian	Female	2017	South	Followed spouse/partner	HR assistant
11	E11	Chinese	Female	1999	Central	Education	Chartered accountant
12	E12	Chinese	Male	1981	Central	Education	Business owner
13	E13	Chinese	Female	2000	Central	Followed spouse/partner	Chef
14	UA01	Chinese	Female	2007	Unassigned	Employment	Homemaker
15	E14	Indian	Female	1983	Northwest	Education	Law lecturer
16	E15	Chinese	Female	2006	Central	Education	Immigration lawyer
17	E16	Eurasian/Chinese	Female	2020	Central	Education	Business owner
18	E17	Chinese	Male	2019	Central	Employment	Doctor
19	E18	Chinese	Female	2012	Central	Education	Microsoft
20	E19	Chinese	Male	2013	Central	Employment	IT Consultant
21	E20	Indian	Female	1990	Central	Education	Specialist physiotherapist
22	E21	Malay	Female	2018	Central	Followed spouse/partner	Doctor
23	E22	Chinese	Female	2010	Central	Education	Lawyer
24	E23	Chinese	Female	2011	Central	Followed spouse/partner	Banker
25	E24	Indian	Female	1975	Central	Education	Retired nurse
26	E25	Chinese	Male	1997	Central	Education	Engineer
27	UA02	Malay	Male	UA	Unassigned	Education	Unassigned
28	UA03	Chinese	Male	1982	Unassigned	Education	Engineer
29	UA04	Chinese	Female	2007	Unassigned	Education	Financial Accountant
30	E26	Indian	Female	2002	Central	Employment	Homemaker
31	E27	Chinese	Female	2010	Central	Education	Communications
32	E28	Malay	Female	1994	Central	Education	Journalist
33	S01	Indian	Male	1998	North	Education	Worker
34	E29	Chinese	Female	2013	Central	Followed spouse/partner	Music teacher

35	UA05	Chinese	Female	2016	Unassigned	Education	Office administrator
36	E30	Chinese	Female	2002	Northwest	Education	Doctor
37	E31	Indian	Female	1979	Central	Education	Retired personal assistant
38	E32	Indian	Female	1998	Southeast	Education	Freelance journalist
39	E33	Singaporean/ Chinese	Female	2016	Central	Followed spouse/partner	Unassigned
40	UA06	Unassigned	UA	1997	Unassigned	Education	Doctor
41	S02	Unassigned	Male	2020	North	Followed spouse/partner	Financial life planner
42	E34	Chinese	UA	2000	Central	Education	Oncologist
43	E35	Unassigned	UA	UA	Central	Education	Unassigned
44	S03	Malay	Female	2016	North	Education	Nurse
45	E36	Malay	Female	2017	South	Followed spouse/partner	HR assistant
46	S04	Malay	Female	2011	North	Employment	Engineer
47	E37	Chinese	Female	2007	Central	Personal experience & lifestyle	Unassigned
48	E38	Chinese	Female	2007	Central	Employment	Administrative work
49	E39	Chinese	Female	2013	Central	Education	Homemaker
50	E40	Mixed	Female	2009	Central	Followed spouse/partner	Former flight attendant
51	E41	Chinese	Female	2010	South	Followed spouse/partner	Homemaker
52	UA07	Unassigned	UA	UA	Unassigned	Education	Unassigned
53	UA08	Unassigned	Male	2020	Unassigned	Followed spouse/partner	Homemaker
54	E42	Indian	Female	1996	Central	Education	Author
55	E43	Chinese	Female	2015	Central	Followed spouse/partner	HR
56	E44	Chinese	Female	2020	Southeast	Employment	Senior Lecturer
57	E45	Chinese	Male	2020	Southeast	Followed spouse/partner	Unassigned
58	UA09	Indian	Female	2009	Unassigned	Followed spouse/partner	Engineer
59	E46	Unassigned	Male	2007	Central	Employment	General manager
60	E47	Chinese	Female	2006	Central	Followed spouse/partner	Part-time coffee shop worker
61	E48	Mixed	Female	2006	Central	Education	Technical sales representative
62	E49	Chinese	Female	2007	North	Followed sibling	Trainer
63	E50	Unassigned	Female	2009	Central	Education	Business owner
64	E51	Indian	Male	2019	Central	Employment	Business owner
65	S05	Chinese	Female	2006	North	Education	Scholar/Lecturer
66	E52	Chinese	Female	2004	North	Education	Pharmacist
67	S06	Indian	Female	2020	North	Followed spouse/partner	Business owner
68	E53	Mixed	Female	1999	South	Followed spouse/partner	Publishing

69	E54	Indian	Male	2019	Central	Employment	Business owner
70	E55	Chinese	Female	2006	North	Education	Doctor
71	E56	Chinese	Female	2008	North	Followed spouse/partner	Buyer
72	E57	Malay	Male	2001	Central	Followed spouse/partner	Job hunting
73	E58	Chinese	Female	2007	North	Followed spouse/partner	Food wholesale importer
74	S07	Malay	UA	2018	North	Education	Student
75	E59	Chinese	Female	2009	North	Followed spouse/partner	Chef
76	E60	Chinese	Female	2001	North	Education	Lecturer
77	E61	Chinese	Female	2020	Central	Education	Student
78	I01	Chinese	Female	2006	North	Education	Business support coordinator
79	E62	Sarawakian	Female	2019	Central	Followed spouse/partner	Business owner
80	UA10	Chinese	Male	2012	Unassigned	Education	Engineer
81	E63	Indian	Female	2016	Central	Employment	Scientist
82	I02	Chinese	Female	2007	North	Education	Unemployed
83	E64	Mixed	Male	2002	Central	Personal experience & lifestyle	Unemployed
84	E65	Chinese	Female	2008	Central	Education	Bank investment
85	S08	Indian	Female	1988	North	Education	Doctor
86	E66	Chinese	Female	1983	Central	Employment	Business owner
87	E67	Malay	Male	2005	Central	Education	Research engineer
88	E68	Chinese	Female	2014	Central	Followed spouse/partner	Property manager
89	E69	Chinese	Female	1991	Central	Education	Homemaker
90	E70	Indian	Male	1991	North	Education	Lawyer
91	E71	Chinese	Female	1997	Central	Education	Engineer
92	E72	Indian	Male	2013	North	Education	Medical trainee
93	E73	Japanese/Chinese	Female	2017	Central	Education	Structural Engineer

Appendix 4: Transcript samples

Participant introductory segments

E57

My name is […]. I've been in […] in UK for the last nearly 20 years now. I'm 45 this year. Currently, I'm still job hunting. I'm doing a little bit more part time due to being made redundant recently. Company has gone into administration. So yes, seriously job hunting as we speak.

E41

[…], married, no children but mother to 2 giant rabbits. Used to work in a bank and university college in Malaysia before moving to England. Currently a homemaker in England. I officially moved to England in 2010 on a spouse visa and received my ILR (indefinite leave to remain) in 2012.

E70

My name is […]. I was born and brought up in Malaysia. My father is from India. In the early 40s, I think. And my mum was born in Malaysia. I think her parents must be from India as well. So, both my parents were both from India, my dad's father is from India, my mother's grandparents must be from India as well. So, I moved to UK in 1990 to pursue my studies. So, during my time in Malaysia, I did my primary school, secondary school. I didn't go to any Uni or anything like that. I started working when I was age 19. And then worked on for about 5-6 years, then decided to move to UK to pursue my education. […] Now I'm in […] since 1990. I did my law degree. Then I did my master's MBA. Then I did a bit of my bar exams, thought of going back to Malaysia and practice. But I did not complete that. Then I did my solicitor's course to be a solicitor in the UK.

E22

Okay, so my name is […]. And I just turned 30 in December. Gosh, so I, first of all, I used to study here, back in 2010 to 2015, I studied in England. And then I left after 2015, I finished my studies, I went back to Malaysia, and I qualified as a lawyer back in Malaysia. So, I was working there for three years. But then I got married, then I moved back here, because husband is British, and we were trying to decide whether prospects were better here or in Malaysia. And it ended up for me to uproot my career and move over. So, this happened around … I came over in 2019.

E34

I am 36 years old. I arrived in the UK in December 2000 to study A-Levels in a college in [England]. I am now working as a consultant clinical oncologist. I am the eldest of four siblings.

S05

Okay. So, you know my name so I wouldn't have to disclose that for your audio recording. My age 37 this year. There are two points of arrival in the UK, the first time was in 2006. And the second time was in 2009. In 2006 I was in […] for a year, and I did my master's in sociological research. And in 2009, I returned to the UK and to [Scotland] this time to do my Ph.D. in sociology.

E04

4/12/20 • 31:26

Helena
00:02

Thank you for agreeing to participate. Let's begin. Could you tell me a bit about yourself?

E04
03:27

My name is …. I live in southeast London in Kent, and I've lived here for 23 years.

Helena
03:41

What is your current professional activity?

E04
03:47

Currently, I am a stay-at-home person. Before that, I was working as an accountant up to 2016 and then and yeah, I'm looking for work now.

Helena
04:11

So, what were the reasons for your migration?

E04
04:15

I came here to do my final year at university to do my degree in computer networks at the University of East London. The plan was just to come and do the final year, which was only one year and the plan was to go back, but I ended up staying. Back then, private colleges in Malaysia didn't offer tertiary education, unless you were accepted to study in the public universities, which meant you either had to be a bumiputra or had scored straight As in O/A-levels as a non. For the rest of us, the only other option was to go overseas, UK being one of the first choice.

Helena
04:36

Okay, and how did England become your choice of destination?

E04
04:43

I think English being quite a strong language for me. So I decided on picking a country that spoke English. So, either Australia, America or the UK. I don't think other countries would have been an option at the time for me because I found it would be quite difficult having to learn another language and then also then doing my Uni studies. Also at the time in Malaysia, the UK education was held a little more, a bit more esteem and worth, then America or Australia.

Helena
05:44

And, and so language has played a part in your decision to migrate to England?

E04
05:51

Yeah, pretty much language is a big reason. And also, like I said, the education, the esteem part, that the UK had. Its education system was a little bit above than America and Australia. I thought at the time.

Helena
06:20

What kind of preparation or process was required for the migration? Any tests that you have to do?

E04
06:31

No, I don't. I mean, like language, I don't think I did any English test, like TESOL or TEFL or whatever. Because I think my, the beginning of the degree, the first three years, I went to a college here in Malaysia. It taught all the subjects in English anyway. So, I think if you were fluent in English, we didn't have to do an English didn't have to sit in an English as entry requirement to come to the University here. I think it was assumed that because courses were taught in English in Malaysia anyway, they assume that your English is up to standard to join the university here. And yeah, I mean, I think I mean, being with my family who has been here on holiday before, about six years before I came here. We were here for a little while. So, it was quite fresh in my memory. And I knew what British culture life was like. So, it wasn't much of a shock. It wasn't like a shock to the system. I kind of fit in. So, it's been fine. And I think the English really helps. I think having the same language or understanding the language really helps.

Helena

08:18

So, is your migration a permanent or temporary one.

E04
08:23

It was temporary at the time, but now suddenly, we're getting here 23 years. I would consider this home a second home.

Helena
08:35

And how has living abroad made you feel in terms of identification? Do you feel Malaysia or British, or a hyphenated identity?

E04
08:44

Yeah, I think I would say I would have a hyphenated identity because inside deep in my core, I am still Malaysian. I feel Malaysian. I think I feel Malaysian. So, I think in my mind, Malaysia comes first. But I also know being here 23 years and being integrated into this culture, this community being immersed in the British culture. And I've lived here for so long. I've lived here now longer than I've lived in Malaysia. So, I feel British as well. So, I would say British Malaysian.

Helena
09:33

Would you also say that you might have a separate identity like for instance, in England you have one identity, and when you go back to Malaysia you have another identity or does it always have both?

E04
09:47

Yeah, I think so. I mean, when I go back home, I do feel Malaysian, I feel more Malaysian and less British. But I don't think the British ever goes away when I'm in Malaysia. Equally here, I'm British, because I am British. But equally, I think maybe the percentage is probably about 50/50 or strongly British and strongly Malaysian. If I introduce myself to anyone if someone asked me, you know, I wouldn't say I'm British, I'd say, oh, a Malaysian because I would assume they think that I opened my mouth because I think I have a slight British accent anyway. I'm assuming when they ask me where you're from, obviously, you're not asking me where I'm from here. I'm assuming they're asking me where I'm from originally. So, I would immediately say Malaysian.

Helena
10:50

Okay, so that will bring me to the next question. What is your response when asked about where you come from? That will be your answer. You will still say you're Malaysian?

E04
10:52

Oh, yeah, definitely. I think I will always say that, because I'm assuming that they know, I'm British, from my accent. I mean, as in not mean, I'm born British, but I've lived here long enough to consider myself. But deep down, I'm still Malaysian, in my mind, in my heart.

Helena
11:20

So, most people still see you as a local British?

E04
11:25

I think that I think that if I don't, even if I don't open my mouth, you know, I think if they just look at me, because I don't look ethnic, like, you know, like, I think people here, Indian people wear saris or salwar kameez or whatever. I don't do that, you know, I like jeans and, and long jackets, you know. So, I would say you can't differentiate me from British here. So, I think and also because you have to remember that in Britain, there are so many foreign, like, Indian, Asian, Pakistan, Chinese. So, people here are used to seeing my colour. And they will assume that oh, you know, you could be British? Because there are so many British Indian, British Pakistani anyway, so they probably think I'm one of those.

Helena
12:27

Okay, and how do you feel about the way people see you there?

E04
12:33

Um, I don't know. Because I think that I don't look Asian in the way I dress like I'm not ethnically dressed. And when I open my mouth, I don't think Malaysian, Indian or Pakistani or Asian or whatever. So, I think they, I'm quite, I'm okay with them thinking of me as a British Asian, you know, I'm okay.

Helena
13:05

Have you ever experienced any discriminations or racism in your 23 years?

E04

13:13

I think only probably once. When I first came over in 97, and 1998, which was near university, and I just had some stupid kids on bikes. They were like little kids, like 12 years old, maybe they just threw rock, cans or, like empty beer cans, and just call me Paky or something. On the bicycle riding off anyway, so just, I think it didn't even hit me what they said. But that was the only time.

Helena
14:01

And what were some of the processes you went through in order to have a sense of belonging, like, as in to have a British accent that you have now, you know, consciously make an effort into integrating the accent or assimilating.

E04
14:19

I think I can call myself a chameleon, because I've picked up whatever, whoever I'm talking to. So, I used to be like, so when I first came here, because initially, it was for one year. In my mind, here to do my degree, finish and go home. So, I thought, well, I'm only here for a year. So, I might as well immerse myself in the culture and the Britishness and learn about Britain and British people. So, I just integrated and immersed myself in this culture. So, I think I have a tendency of picking up the accent of the person I'm talking to. So, if I'm talking to a lot of British people, but also, I watch a lot of British English TV. So, you know you learn quite a lot of accents, not what you call slang, slang words. So, it is colloquialism, you know all of that. So, you know, you pick up these things, you know, like you, you know, and you use them in your everyday language, you sound quite British. And also, like I said, I pick up accents very easily. So, if I were to speak to an Italian who's speaking to me in English, I would sort of go gravitate towards the Italian English accent, it's weird. Like, if it's Portuguese, you know, I've had a bit of a Portuguese English accent. But now that I'm married to Irish, I've been told that my English sounds a bit of Irish. Yeah, I do try and make it a very conscious effort in the beginning to really immerse myself in this culture and integrate into this culture and try

to be British English, but just, you know, just be seamless and just immerse in the culture. And, and I made an effort actually just mixing with the western people, and then stick but the one thing I didn't do was stick to just a Malaysian circle of friends, definitely didn't do that. I mean, I did have obviously I came here with my college. That was my class in college, so everyone was Malaysian. But even though we did study together, like in class, we might sit everywhere. I made a conscious effort of mixing with other people, and not just sticking to the Malaysian again.

Helena
17:19

That obviously brings me to my next question: your circle of friends. How would you describe yourself? You have a mixed circle of friends, more British?

E04
17:31

Right now. I have no Malaysian friends except one, who happens to be a neighbour who only found out a year ago, less than a year ago about this girl that live in my neighborhood. But and before that, I mean, I might have had one or two Malaysian friends, but I haven't kept in touch with them, or they've left the country, or they've moved away. So, I can't say that I have a Malaysian circle of friends, because the only one I know is Hary, thanks to you. And I've been introduced to this Malaysian mummies group, the local group. So I've met and been talking to a few more Malaysian so I think I'd say in the last week, in this week, I've probably met more Malaysians than I before, met as friends and talk to all Malaysians today. Not in the last 10 years.

Helena
18:53

And so, how significant are, you know, ethnic or religion and politics in your life? Like your religious identity, or ethnic identity? Are those things important to you? Or irrelevant?

E04
19:14

I don't know. I mean, I'm not too obsessed by politics. For me, I think it's politics. I mean, I think it goes on very much about animal welfare and wildlife conservation, and the environment. So for me, that's important. So the party that you know, bans for something for an example, you know, would be the party that I would go for. So think I think conservatives have thinking of banning funding. So for me, you know, even though

I don't like Boris Johnson, but the party stands for, you know, those are the things that matter to me. But again, like I said, I'm not really crazy about politics, I don't get to passion about it more to involve. But ethnicity, I mean, only to feel half British half Malaysian any way. But if someone were to call, you know, if there's something Malaysian going on, I would definitely be there. I would be there. Just like, I think last year, or the year before. I think Malaysian TV company are coming over here to feel, Malaysians and how they feel about the Malaysians and the elections campaign. Somebody got me in touch, and told me about this TV group coming coming here to film. And so and she was looking for, you know, if if you're Malaysian, she said to get in touch. And I did, because I've I found that, you know, something Malaysian, it was something intrinsic in me anyway. So I wanted to, I was curious, and I wanted to get involved in any way I can. So I do I do try. I do. I don't seek out. But if it comes to my attention, I would, I would acknowledge it, and I would try and partake in it. And religion for me is quite, is probably the most important of the three. And I was born Catholic, and I'm married to a Catholic. Even though we probably don't go to church as often. I still feel in my heart. I'm Catholic, and I feel proud and strong, strongly about it.

Helena
22:07

Okay, any thoughts about Brexit?

E04
22:18

That's the one thing I agree with David Cameron, because he didn't want to be Brexit there. And I agree. Because when we're in Ireland, we can't be on our own. And I think we need Europe, and I feel strongly against Brexit. But I can't do anything because the majority of the voters wanted to leave Europe.

Helena
22:53

Do you have any predictions for the future? Now that, you know, once Brexit is has finalised?

E04
23:04

I think so before Brexit, before the campaign, you know, the election, trying to figure out what the nation wants it, whether to leave or stay, remain? I think at the time, part of what's happening, Donald Trump was in power. And he was very pro pro UK, because

Trump and Johnson were very close. And so I think or is when, along with Trump, because he said, Oh, you know, you know, we will trade with your UK anyway. So you know, you don't have to worry, this business will carry on as usual between US and UK and US. Economy. It's huge. So, and I think that Boris Johnson thought, Oh, well, you know, we can survive, because we've got the US on our side. But now, Trump has gone inside. And so we're not sure if Biden is pro UK or not. So it is a bit worrying. Yeah. And I have a feeling that the UK people who voted to leave are going to regret leaving, I think so. I just don't think that we can survive without Europe. I think I think US is going to leave us on our knees. So I think that we are going to need US too to be on our side. And I think it's too late. It's a big mistake. But that's me. No, I'm not pro, remain anyway.

Helena
25:12

How do I feel about returning to Malaysia? How do you feel people see you? Is there a difference after migration?

E04
25:21

When I go there for holiday? Yeah. Well, I, I don't think so I thought as I said, you know, like I'm a chameleon, I thought I pick up accent, whoever I speak to pick up their accent and I thought well being Malaysian. After a couple of days, my accent would have just gone back to Malaysian anyway. And then a couple of my cousins said, Oh, no, you still have a bit of a British accent even though you're speaking with a Malaysian accent. There's a slight twinge of British so but I don't think I will still speak Malay. But then it's not like in Malaysia, it's so English anyway. Like, you know, it's pretty much I think, I'd say in the city in KL or PJ. People have in half Malay and Malay speaking English speaking. So you could just have a whole conversation with a shopkeeper in English. It doesn't matter. But so I get away with it. I don't think. No, in my mind, I don't think people know that I'm British. Maybe they might, they might pick up a little bit of a British accent and think, Oh, well, not really from here. So but I don't feel I don't feel different. When I go back home. I don't think different unless when I had my head spin. I made quite a slightly better treatment. But I don't feel different. I don't think they treat me different.

Helena
27:21

Do you miss Malaysia?

E04
27:23

Oh, yeah, I do miss the country, miss the culture of the country because it's beautiful for me. My eyes, Malaysia is just on the top. It's so beautiful. In terms of one. Wildlife is extraordinary. There are so many species that are so endangered. And you cannot find anywhere else in the world. So for me, I'm a big, you know, wildlife enthusiasts anyway. So that plays a big part, but also the nature for me nature's a big thing as well. And we have beautiful nature with the tropical forests. jungles, rain forests, jungle. I think it's a beautiful country and obviously, and food. Can't forget food, food there is top notch. I don't think you ever get that kind of mix anywhere else in the world. Not even here. Even though here you have some many different cultures, and you have all kinds of different food. I don't know, somehow. In Malaysia, I think things are getting more more cultures there as well. So I think it was really good even before the fusion food. But I think there's even more now.

Helena
28:32

So, what encourages you to stay on in England?

E04
28:41

No, I think I said I've lived here longer than in Malaysia. So used to it here. I've worked here. I mean, I did one year placement. For my, for my degree, did a one year placement in Malaysia, in, in Digital Malaysia. And that was the only work experience I had in Malaysia. So, you know, a breath worked here, between 18, 20 years, I think, you know, I've lived, I've worked here on my whole work life was here. I'm used to this. I'm used to how the system works here. The culture is the word culture. So an I'm married to an Irish, you know, he's comfortable. You know, he's comfortable living here. So I can't see myself going home. I think I think this is I think this is home now.

Helena
29:56

Yeah. So that's where you see yourself in the future?

E04
30:00

No. Well, I think most of the time. Yeah, I'd say, I think 75% I think I'm here and my future. When I think of my future, I see it here. But obviously, my husband is Irish, and

he will, he would love to go back to Dublin at some stage, I think. And then it's not such a difficult change for me because Dublin is pretty similar to London. So it wouldn't be too difficult to do to adjust to Dublin. But I think I think of that center, the center, I think, I think I'm pretty sure we're going to be staying in London.

Helena
30:54

Is there anything else that you'd like to add, any information or experiences?

E04
31:05

No, I think no.

Helena
31:10

Okay. Well, thank you for your time and for answering as honestly as possible. But if there's a need for more information, would it be possible to get in touch with you?

E04
31:20

Yes.

Helena
31:21

Okay, thank you so much again. Have a good day.

E21

04/02/2021 • 15:15

Helena
00:00

Do I have your permission for me to ask you questions?

Dinah

Yes

Helena

Okay, great. Could you tell me a bit about yourself?

E21
00:12

So, I'm 30-31 years old, I moved here to London three years ago, 2018. I am a doctor by trainee. And I did my kind of foundation years and my husband from there. And then I decided to come here. Sort of to partially to join my husband and partially to kind of get more training here. But at the beginning, it was very much to join my husband's I was in actually working for like a year.

Helena
01:01

How long have you have you been in England? So which part of England?

E21

London. I've been here the whole time, but although I've moved around 2018.

Helena
01:19

Okay. All right. So you moved here for your education?

E21
01:26

For marriage. And then education. So a few key reasons.

Helena
01:34

And UK as your choice because of your husband? And what about language, English? Is that one of the reasons to have migrated there as well? I mean, if, let's say your husband was French, would you have moved to France?

E21
01:55

My husband's Malaysian, he's also a doctor. And then he studied here and just continued on here. And then I was in Malaysia. But no, I think, definitely the UK is easy, because it was, yeah, it's English. And I guess I always part of me always wanted, wished that I had studied in the UK before I came here. Like, so much. But yeah, you know that there's a thing of people going setting UK under the impression of that being a sort of a, quote unquote, high quality of things. So yeah, I'm not sure if it was in other country. I don't think I would have gone.

Helena
02:38

Okay. What kind of preparation or process was required when you moved? I mean, did you have some sort of… just talking about official paper paperwork, tests or something?

E21
02:51

Like the immigration stuff? So initially, I was on a dependent visa. And I applied from, from Malaysia. And yes, I had, I'm on my husband's documentation and everything, our marriage certificate, all of that stuff. So it's quite a long document. Here to dependent visa until about 2019. And then I got when I was here, I got my job. And I had to apply for a tier two visa. But for some reason, I couldn't do it from here, because you can't switch from independent visa to your own tier two visa when you're in the UK, so I had to go back I started to fly back home to Malaysia and apply for it there. And that was a bit of a nightmare because it took about took a lot longer than I thought it would take like a month. And I thought was gonna take a week. Yeah, and then for my own self, so now I'm on my own visa.

Helena
04:05

Okay. So is your migration of permanent or temporary one?

E21
04:10

So it so right now it's, it's temporary, but it might be we don't know. We don't… it might be permanent. We'll see.

Helena
04:22

So three years in England in London. Do you still do you still feel very Malaysian. Do you maybe feel a bit British as well like a hyphenated identity or maybe a separate identity?

E21
04:35

I do not feel British at all. I feel completely Malaysian. The longer I'm here, the more I'm very much Malaysian.

Helena
04:52

What is your response when someone asks you about your nationality, where you come from? What do you say? Do you have to explain where Malaysia is?

E21
05:05

So most of the person, you know, people have maybe it's because I'm in medicine. So a lot of times people are asking are my colleagues and they always say, Oh, actually, yeah, I know somebody from Malaysia. And that's the common response. And I think it's because there's obviously loads and loads of nations here. So people know where it is.

Helena
05:26

Okay. And have you ever experienced any discrimination or racism?

E21
05:36

It's hard to. Yeah, that's the thing, isn't that… very, very insidiously, I would say. I think it's difficult, because, suddenly, so yeah, I think it's really interesting coming from that kind of position of like, relative privilege. Sort of recognise that Oh, yeah. immigrant and brown, immigrant in the scene like that. But just really small things. For example. You know, I think there was once where, you know, when COVID started, then somebody one of my colleagues, my senior made a joke about like, Oh, no, you can't hold hands. And we can't shake hands anymore. We have to do that. We have to do that thing where

I think it was like trying to like, last day or so one thing, and then he kind of looked at me. So what's that called? And like, the kind of expectation of like, you know, you are all the same, but very, very subtle. So nothing else right at all. But yeah, you feel it.

Helena
06:46

And how did you settle in? Did you have any difficulties at the beginning? Did you have any degree of assimilation or integration? Did you have to work on an accent?

E21
06:58

So in terms of assimilation, I think, at the beginning, it was it was extremely, a bit of culture shock. I guess, even though you would know what, what it's like to come here, and it will go even if you visit here, but yeah, it's really it was really lonely first year. So yeah, I didn't really know how to kind of interact with a lot of the usual things. I feel like there's kind of unspoken politeness that you need to kind of learn like this. The normal things people say to each other, that don't really mean anything that kind of politeness. So I feel like that took a long time to kind of pick up on even though you know, it's something that you see maybe on TV or whatever, but like you don't practice in real life, because it's just, you know, something that might be considered rude. Here is maybe normal, back home and or vice versa. So I think it took a while to learn all the old niceties. But in terms of English, not really, because I think I've always had same accent.

Helena
08:10

Yeah. And do you feel you belong where you live now?

E21
08:16

Not really. I think I'm comfortable. But don't feel a sense of community. Yeah, if that makes sense.

Helena
08:26

What do you do on the weekends? Do you go out with your friends? Do you have hobbies? Do you go are you know, do you go to social clubs?

E21
08:37

Before this, maybe we have like a couple of friends. Also Malaysian that we might meet. But not you know, not every day. Not every single weekend. But we try to nearly every weekend at least one more of the days. But not I don't go to you know, I don't go to clubs. I don't drink. I think that's one of the major things that is a big cultural barrier, because we don't drink and it's the pub culture here is like, it's so important. And I know people people say, Oh, you know, you can go but you don't drink. I think that's still a huge reason to not go because it's not fun to go when other people are doing that. And so I think that's really hard to connect with, you know, white British people, in that sense.

Helena
09:45

How would you describe your circle of friends? Are there like a mix of friends. Do you have a mix of friends? Are they more Asians?

E21
09:57

Yeah, it is. I would say actually it's, mostly Asians. So Asians. Actually, it's all Malaysian but, I mean, there are colleagues on a bit closer to the others, but I wouldn't consider them like, part of my close friends.

Helena
10:15

Okay. How do you feel about your ethnicity and religion? Do they help in defining your identity now? Any importance?

E21
10:27

Yeah, I think so it's always been very important to me being not so much my ethnicity, but just being just being Asian, not so much my specific ethnicity of being Malay. Being Malaysian, in being Asian and brown. As well as being Muslim, it has always been really important. Even more so here. And I think it's a lot easier in London to hold on to those identities because a lot of people other people are also told, so have there's so many other BMEs, anything that's easier to be like, yeah, this that's, it's normal.

Helena
11:04

Are you involved in politics? Do you watch political programs or have discussions on politics with your family, your friends?

E21
11:21

In terms of formal, you know, political parties, or whatever, but I definitely have very strong views and certain things, but I don't discuss that with everyone. Just with a people who are really close.

Helena
11:37

How do you feel when you return to Malaysia? Is there a difference now, after your migration? Do you miss Malaysia? Do you want to return to Malaysia?

E21
11:48

I think since the since COVID happened, I've not been able to go back for since last January. And I would usually go back at least once or twice. I mean, ideally, I would have gone. I used to go back once or twice a year. So I think the more longer I'm not there, the more I miss it. And the more I do want to go back, I think right now, you know, we don't know what they're gonna be, you know, the back of my mind. I really do want to go back.

Helena
12:21

I see. And after migration, so but you have come back the last three years. I mean, before that, you went back?

E21

Yeah.

Helena

So, after migration, are there elements or elements or sentiments that might have retained as a Malaysian? Like perhaps food? Is your food palate still the same? Hospitality in Malaysia?

E21
12:42

Yeah. I think there's things that I would miss I think things that are the most Malaysian. Yeah, it's actually it is actually food because everything, that's the thing that we can hold on to that we can replicate in here. And that's the easiest thing, and it's the most immediate thing that immediately brings you back. So I think that is if not for food, I

don’t know how Malaysian I could feel. So that’s really how I tend to whenever I’m feeling homesick, I think.

Helena
13:18

Okay, so what actually makes you stay here, what encourages you to stay on where you live? I mean, how do you see yourself in the future? Do you have any plans?

E21
13:34

I have about maybe five or six years to go with my training, hopefully until I become a consultant. So that’s the minimum amount and then, you know, after that I do, see maybe practicing care or, or going back. That’s not we’re still on there.

Helena

Okay. Yeah. All right. Well, actually we are done.

E21

So, to speak, to be sort of seen as you lose a lot of that privilege and a lot of power. And that’s like, a lot of maybe, you know, a lot of racial stuff, a lot of like, financial stuff. And yeah, I think that that is most that was what I got from my first couple of years as an immigrant. I wasn’t on my own visa, like really dependent and didn’t even have bank account here for a little while. And all these things I think for you when you have when you don’t have those things those roots, so we don’t have a bank account. You don't have an address, pay bills and things like that. You just feel like you don’t know who you are and then you’re struggling with that identity and then you have to start putting those things down if you start feeling more solid. Yeah, that’s the only thing I wanted to add.

E19

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Helena
00:00

Do I have your permission to ask your questions about your life in England?

E19

Yes, yes you do.

Helena

Alright, so maybe we could start by you telling me about a bit about yourself, like your age, your name, your age, family detail what you used to do before, what you're doing now, how long you've been in England?

E19
00:37

43 years old. In the UK since 2013 years. I've been in the UK before that. And I was actually based in Dubai for three and a half years. So, I'm an IT consultant. So, I specialise in consultancy work when I was in Malaysia. What other information that you need to know… my daughter was born in the UK, so she's 11 now. I'm Malaysian Chinese, and my wife is Malaysian "lain-lain". She's a mix. And I'm from KL.

Helena
01:49

Okay, great. Fantastic. What were the reasons for your migration?

E19
02:00

Australia study for about three years, spending some time in Malaysia, in Australia. So there were quite a few factors in terms of our decision to leave Malaysia. Away from Malaysia. One, I guess, and that's one primarily. Secondly, I guess when I was younger, we do feel that as if we were second class citizens to a certain extent, although we were born, we never felt that we belong. But over time. I don't know if you feel this way. But back in the 80s and 90s, when I was growing up, we felt that the racial harmony was a lot more and was a lot better. But things have sort of like, moved away from it and whereby, what at least what from my feelings and from my sentiments, it seems like the political class was playing along with divide and conquer. And that to ensure we remain

in power, which then translates to me feeling a little bit more, a little bit disenfranchised, and disconnected from being a Malaysian. So, I don't know, either. This is a bit too strong. But that that was how I felt at that, at that point in time. And I've always felt especially to the experience of moving to Australia to study and to and it opened up my eyes to the world. So naturally, I thought, okay, that's actually a few things out there in the world, and I like to see it.

Helena
04:22

I see. And why did you move to England then?

E19
04:31

It was, I guess it was sort of by chance. So, I was an assessed consultant, back in KL for local partner, and for a few years, for what, three or four years. Then there were opportunities in terms from Dubai, because my wife actually she used to work with Singapore Airlines. So, then she got recruited by Emirates, to move to Dubai. Then I started in Dubai, I measured the local branch of SAS. And they actually approached me and said, Okay, let's have that interview, and they really liked me. So, within six months, or between that initial interview, after that I was there. And, and I was covering downtown middle, Middle East region, I was flying to Saudi Arabia, to Cairo to Jordan, and everywhere else in between. So, once I established myself, then we decided that we wanted to start a family, then Dubai was not exactly conducive to, for us to start a family. So, we were looking for opportunities in the US and the UK. I wasn't too drawn to the US, for certain reasons, in terms of the way that marketing and selling and everything else is quite apparent in the US. And on top of that. There's always the gun laws. It wasn't so relaxed there. So then, I got headhunted by a recruiter for a consultancy in the UK. And it's really like your profile. Would you like to have a chat with? So, I did. I went through about two interviews. And then before I know it, they were in the midst of applying for my visa. My work permit to actually move to the UK. So, and here I am 13 years later.

Helena
07:05

I see. So you've spent a year in Australia? Is there a difference? Do you feel that there's a difference with the lifestyle there? And in England? Do you have a preference?

E19
07:31

Well, there's always pros and cons, everywhere. I guess initially, when I was in Australia, when I first started studying in Australia. It was actually quite nice. To be honest, I was based in Melbourne. My uni was actually in Melbourne, the weather was nice. People were nice. Generally, you do get a bit of all of some of the Malaysians around but generally 99% of the time everybody was nice to you. The weather was great. There was everything that you wanted. So, it was an especially everything was new, so used to the culture, you absorb everything, the food and everything else. Then, but obviously because Australia, similar to New Zealand, they are quite far away from the other Western societies. So yes, all the rest cluster within are surrounded by Asia. So, you do get a significant amount of Asian influence in Australia, even from way back then. In the UK, I do find that it's, again, it's a melting pot, but it's a lot more mixed compared to Australia. Because you do get a lot of people from various different countries in Asia, Europe, even Eastern Europe, or Russia and the States. So the melting pot here is a lot more diverse compared to Australia.

Helena
09:13

Yeah. Okay. And that's quite appealing, right?

E19
09:18

Yeah, it is. It is quite appealing, sort of to an extent.

Helena
09:23

Do you think that language played a part in your decision to move you know, to Australia and England later on? Like the fact that you speak English, and you don't have to learn any other language?

E19
09:40

I guess it's convenient, to a certain extent because having been born and bred in Subang were a small town or were closer KL and because most of our parents and our friends' parents were educated during the British colonisation period. So therefore, English, a lot of us use, a lot wider in KL and PJ and around the Selangor area. So, I guess we're quite comfortable in terms of the language. And obviously, then we tend to seek out countries

where we're a little bit more comfortable with Australia, the UK or the US. So, I guess it does play a part in it. I guess because especially in terms of finding work or professional, it plays a bigger part because if I was actually moved to Germany, for example, or France, then there's this transition period where you actually have to make sure that you have to force yourself to learn French, in not only casual terms, but it's also from a business perspective. And also, there's a lot less opportunities to begin with, unless, of course, you assimilate yourself and you're able to actually speak proper French.

Helena
11:12

I totally agree with you. What about some of the processes, like paperwork and stuff before you had to move to the UK? Was it difficult though? Was it difficult to go through this process?

E19
11:41

Yes. And no, I guess to a certain extent, because, yes, there's a lot of paperwork. No, because the hiring company that I had, the role, the company that hired me, had an agent to do the running around, they know what to ask for. They know who to liaise with. And because, obviously, I have sufficient documentation, because I went through it when I went to Dubai. So, also, I've had majority of the documentation already available. So that made the move a little bit easier, I would assume. But yes, there's a lot of documentation that you actually need to go through in order. So, it's not a straightforward process.

Helena
12:32

And is your migration a permanent one or temporary? Do you plan to go back?

E19
12:42

Yes, since this is anonymous, and then see if we say that I'm already a citizen. I think yeah, it's more or less permanent. There's very little incentive for me to actually move back to work besides family, and parents are getting older and that's very rarely incentive for me to actually move back to Malaysia.

Helena
13:09

So, coming back to this your citizenship, what made you decide to be a citizen?

E19
13:18

Even before I got my permanent residence, I felt more at home, and I felt that my rights are more protected in the UK. So, and because, since I know that it's going to be a long-term decision, the decision to stay here is a long-term decision. I think I'd rather be a citizen here and build my life here as opposed to being one foot in here and one foot in Malaysia.

Helena
13:58

So, having said that, do you still feel Malaysian?

E19
14:04

Well, if you look into my kitchen, then yes. If you ask my daughter who is being born and bred here, what her favourite food is then yes, we are very much still very Malaysian and jokes and the way we talk our jokes, how we relate to it and our friends. We mix around with quite a lot of different nationalities, but we also have some Malaysian friends as well. For my wife, there's a strong group of Malaysian mums that get together and then meet up and share food and share recipes and do whatever else and chitchat and gossip, I guess. And that's that pretty much very Malaysian. But I, we rather, call ourselves global citizens. But yes, we do have our heart set on some of the things that we used to love being Malaysian.

Helena
15:20

Yeah, food definitely, isn't it? That's what we are good for.

E19
15:25

Exactly. I mean, yeah, most of most of the food we eat on a daily basis is still a variation. The only thing is, the one good thing about being in the UK so that you can then be able to appreciate all the types of food and even other types of Asian food, be it Japanese, Korean, and everything else because there are diasporas, all Japanese diasporas, Koreans, and everybody else. All around. So, a lot of the food here is quite authentic as well. So yeah. A lot wider choice of food besides your fish and chips and your burgers.

Helena

16:06

Very interesting. Because you see you're British by citizenship, but you feel very Malaysian. So how do you I mean, how do you go about? I mean, I do feel like you British Malaysian? Is it like, a hyphenated identity, with British here and then you go back to Malaysia, it's more Malaysian? Does that make sense what I'm asking?

E19
16:34

It sort of makes sense. I mean, what is an identity? Well, I mean, I've been confused about it ever since I was young. You do feel Malaysian to a certain extent because I was born and bred there. And I've lived my entire youth in Malaysia. So, I feel very, very much Malaysia. I can't say the same but my daughter, but from her food palate perspective. She's very much Malaysian. But she's also born and bred here. So, it's a slightly different identity perspective. I think I've sort of given up on thinking that I will fit in a specific box, per se. Do I think of myself as British? Do I think of myself as Malaysian? Or do I think of myself as Malaysian Chinese? Those kinds of questions, they do spring to mind. But the thing is, it makes it a lot easier here. Because of the melting pot of society here, because I can have a really good friend who is Aussie. Our family friends are from Ukraine, from Spain, from Portugal. So, even though we are off, far away from our home network to some extent, but we've sort of built our lives around in the UK. And we, I'm more than happy to go with my mates to the pub for a pint of beer. I play squash with all the British white people. We do hang around most weekends. So, I guess there's an extent, you sort of like adapt to the different situations. And because we have that Malaysian background, then it's sort of like it makes it easier for us to adapt to different people and different culture and different religion. And, and just make friends and be happy of who you are.

Helena
18:52

Yeah, definitely. I was just wondering about like, when you're with your friends, or when you meet new people, I mean, does the question inevitably come up… where you come from?

E19
19:05

It's always a topic of conversation.

Helena
19:11

What do you say, British or …?

E19
19:15

Again, it depends on how much time you've got. If you say I made a new person, and then you have a chat all the time, then you said Oh, where were you originally from? etc, etc. Then I will take that question as an opportunity to then explain and then talk about myself. And tell them I'm actually originally Malaysian. And then there'll be curious that question, are you Malay? No, I'm not and I have to then explain why I'm actually Malaysian Chinese. And it adds to the confusion when they see my wife because, then she's like darker skin but she's not Malay, or Indian. She's Malaysian, but she's Sri Lankan. That is solid Ceylonese. And then her mom is Irish. And so, why she believes all that sort of conversations will come into play then. But it is, so like, it becomes the topic that sort of like that helps you get to know everybody else, to a certain extent.

Helena
20:32

Yeah, definitely fascinating conversations I'm sure you have.

E19
20:35

Yeah. I mean, obviously, sometimes, especially with the Coronavirus. Some of my squash club members will be like, oh, then we'll be asking like, what's with this Chinese thing? And then I'll tell them like, first of all, I've not been to China. So, I can explain to you why. Although I'm Malaysian Chinese. I am not native Chinese. I have got no links whatsoever to China. That sort of stuff.

Helena
21:08

Have you ever experienced any discrimination or racism in your 13 years here?

E19
21:16

I'll be honest with you, none. I probably feel more discriminated in Malaysia than here. Yeah. I don't know about in France, because France is slightly different. But for me, for me in the UK, professionally, personally, I've not had that problem whatsoever. And that, eventually, there was no glass ceiling. I was, I mean, in a very short time I was promoted

to one of the top senior consultants within the organisation that I was working for. And it was all based on merit. There was no discrimination whatsoever.

Helena
22:01

Okay, that's great. Good for you.

E19
22:06

Yeah, I mean, because as a consultant, I actually travel around the UK quite a lot. So, I actually spent like, a year and a bit up in Edinburgh. I spent a few months in Wales in North Wales, and everyone was friendly. I make friends with the colleagues, and also in terms of the hotels I stay in. Because whenever I go on long-term assignments, I tend to bring my squash rackets around and just go to any local club and play. And people just make friends with you, not only in London, because some people might say, Oh, is it just because it's London? No. London is a melting pot. True. But if I go up north, anywhere, meet Scotland, Wales, everyone is just friendly. And they're just sometimes curious. They'll ask some questions. But genuinely I'm just friendly, personally and professionally.

Helena
23:10

Compared to the south of England?

E19
23:14

I live in the south of England. I guess, London is a little bit more. There's no discrimination whatsoever. From my perspective is probably some people will think that London is a little bit less friendly. But I probably tend to disagree with that. They're more quiet. The people don't tend to talk to each other, talk to strangers. But yeah, there's always a lot of online groups to get people together. And whenever you join those online groups, especially in the first few years I was here. I met, got to know a lot of people, they were friendly and continued to become friends for a long time. So, I don't see that as an issue. Be it north or south of England.

Helena
24:09

Right. How about how did you settle in? Like, did you have any difficulties at the beginning? Or did you have to assimilate? Oh, I noticed your accent is very neutral. Very clear, a very neutral accent.

E19
24:29

I guess that started even in Australia and Dubai and so on, so forth. Of course, I can switch to heavier Malaysian accent. I can add all the lahs and whatever it is and be as normal as the next Malaysian. But obviously when, because of study needs and because of me in a professional setting, then I would need to make sure that I'm understood by all parties, so which that means that I have to make sure that I am in a present or in talks or in meetings, everybody understands me, which is why it's more a little bit more neutral. And, as opposed to the heavier Malaysian accent, yes, that's probably something that you probably have to adapt yourself to. In terms of integration, I think it was fairly easy for me to sort of… once you move from one country to another, more than once, then everything just becomes second nature to you, you move in, you need to, you know, you need to find a place to stay, to settle in, then you need to, obviously have a job, then the next thing you need to do is you need to expand on your social life, or be networking with other people. And for me, it's always been sports, racquet, sports, squash, anything. And then that's related to that. So, by having activities, especially sports activities, that you know, you're decent, that then I find that it's a lot easier for you to start assimilating and start making friends. And once you start making one or two friends, it's quite easy for you to expand on that. Now with us having a daughter, my wife is quite proactive with the parents at school, and it's where we start making friends in that avenue as well. So, then once you have a few girlfriends then things just carry on.

Helena
26:48

So, having lived 13 years, do you feel you belong where you live now?

E19
26:53

Yeah, I would say that I'll be more comfortable here than in Malaysia. I mean, be it the weather be it, whatever it is. So, after a few weeks, I'll be like, I'm actually, it's time for me to back to London.

Helena

27:11

Yeah. London is home.

E19

Yeah. Right.

Helena
27:13

What do you do at the weekend? So, you play squash? Do you to go out? You go out with your friends, you go to pubs and things like that? You've joined social clubs?

E19
27:36

Oh, yeah. I mean, my daughter's activities also take up a lot of my time as well. So, we tend to ferry her around for swimming lessons, for tennis lessons, and so on and so forth. So yeah. And that is quite a bit of time as well.

Helena
27:51

Yeah. How do you feel about what we talked about a little bit earlier, how do you feel about your ethnicity and religion? Does that help you in defining who you are now? Or does it not matter?

E19
28:12

I'm not sure it matters too much to be honest with you. On number one, I'm an agnostic, so I'm not to be going on religions. My wife is Catholic. Initially, we did tend to go to the church during the weekends, we do have friends that are from some of the churches, so but it doesn't dominate our lives. So, religion does not dominate our lives. So, it's not too big of an issue for me to assimilate. From ethnicity perspective, I guess, because I'm in a mixed marriage. My daughter's mixed, we're in a different country. And again, the melting pot. So, I guess that really doesn't come into play at all on a day-to-day basis. It's just as the colour of my skin. I guess also, to a certain extent, because I'm not too traditional in that sense, whereby I don't have that much links or ties to very traditional ethnic-based culture, or rituals. I guess that doesn't rule my life on a day-to-day basis.

Helena
29:34

Okay. Are you involved in politics? Do you watch political programs or have discussions on politics with family friends?

E19
29:51

Yes, but I wouldn't say that it dominates my life. I'm not active in politics per se. I'm interested in… I vote in elections in local elections and national elections. So, I do partake in politics to some extent, but it doesn't dominate my life.

Helena
30:18

Okay, you have any thoughts or predictions on Brexit?

E19
30:25

I'm quite neutral to a certain extent, because the thing is that this… let's just say that on both sides, there's limits to the truth, just an extent whereby, on both sites, again, politics here is all about, either left or right. One extreme did another extreme, with a more to be a fan of the things on the left that I may agree with. There are things on the right, that I may agree with. And I don't believe that, for example, I think Brexit, I don't think every single person that actually vote for Brexit is xenophobic. That's my thoughts. And my experience as well, because the people that I've spoken to, that voted for Brexit are my friends. And by association, they treat me as a friend. So therefore, it does not mean that anyone who voted for Brexit is you know, a racist. Who wants the country to remain closed? I think there's a much bigger discussion and relationship with the EU. And I've seen how it works. And there are things whereby there's just too much bureaucracy to get agreement from 27 different countries for any decision is a tough task. So, for me, I like efficiency. That's this part of the Chinese thing that just never left. I just like efficiency. I just like these to work. I don't like bureaucracy; I don't like never ending discussions with no final outcome. So, I can see I can relate to why some people feel disenfranchised with the EU. And what the other way. And I can also see the benefits of being part of EU because I used to travel quite a lot. Before COVID I used, we used to travel a lot around Europe, so I can drive down in about an hour and a half. I'll be in Callais so it's very convenient. I used to love snowboarding in Port de Soleil in Switzerland. So, I do travel quite a bit. I'm well-travelled, so I see this. I love open borders; I love to be able to travel around and stuff. But at the same time in the UK, I do see why having open borders with Europe is a problem because I spent because when I

travel around the UK, there are parts and parcels of the UK whereby it's just been dominated by a certain section of society. And gaming on necessary integrates very well with the rest of the society. So, I do see overpopulation in certain parts. So, there are there are challenges that the country is facing, which then justifies why certain people vote for Brexit. So again, I've seen both sides of the story. I don't necessarily agree with either side. So yeah, that's my take on it.

Helena
34:13

Okay. Do you go back to Malaysia? Often? I mean, obviously, not right now, but usually?

E19
34:21

Well, when we used to be able to travel probably twice a year, sometimes three times, but yeah, at least twice a year, during which we spend about two weeks, at least two to three weeks. And my daughter was younger, we used to travel we, my wife and my daughter used to spend probably about two to three months. But ever since she started school and then school life and her life are more based in the UK and then it's been about two weeks each time.

Helena
34:55

Okay. And how do you feel when you return? I mean, is there a difference now compared to before?

E19
35:11

The landscape has changed. Things you find on one highway or everything else, more chaotic in my eyes. There's a lot more shopping centres, everybody spent a lot of time in the shopping centres because it's so hot outside. So yeah. Is there a specific difference that you're looking for that I should focus on?

Helena
35:37

Maybe, because you mentioned that you always felt indifferent. You always felt a bit different when you're growing up? You know, which is probably why you left. Has that you know, gotten better? Do you feel that it's gotten worse?

E19

35:58

It hasn't changed much. My, if you ask me, to actually go unless there's massive opportunity for me to actually work in Malaysia probably, I won't mind it. I'm not necessarily a big fan of lifestyle there. I do miss those parts whereby it's like, yes, our life doesn't stop at eight or nine o'clock at night. We tend to go to mamak, when I was younger, I probably spent a lot of time in ss 15 up to about two three o'clock in the morning. We used to go clubbing a lot. But that was for my younger life. So, there's a lot of things too, a lot of food to eat everywhere go. Yeah, whether when I would go back and, whether I felt that things have changed for the better. Not so sure. Especially not in the current political climate in Malaysia is literally running around rudderless. So, and corruption has obviously been far, far worse, compared to 13 years ago. So that hasn't changed. I feel that if I were, I feel I will probably feel a lot more disenfranchised compared to when I was younger. And I feel that I'm actually quite one of the lucky ones who might actually have a choice. And because I've established myself outside of Malaysia, I think it's a lot easier for me to actually move anywhere else. If I wanted as opposed to some of my friends who, who when I visit, when I get back, sometimes they compare their lives. Sometimes they're envious. When it rightly or wrongly, they are envious. They say if I have a choice, I might leave. And that's for people who are in their late 30s and 40s, which is a much bigger decision as compared to someone who in your 20s.

Helena
38:18

Well, I suppose you plan to stay on. I mean, that's where you live now. You live in London, you're not going to leave. That is probably where you see yourself in the future?

E19
38:35

Yes, I think my life here is a little bit more established now. Maybe there are opportunities elsewhere. But for me, I like their work life balance here. Even before COVID I've been given an opportunity to work remotely majority of my time. So, the work life balance here is really, really good. I've managed to spend a lot of time with my family. We're teaching my daughter how to swim, teaching how to play racquet sports. Just spending time doing stuff. And obviously, we've got a lot more opportunities to go on holiday in different countries. Purely because it's cheaper. And that gives us that sort of advantage of actually being able to go to different countries every year. So, it's probably one of the

opportunities that you don't necessarily get if you're working and living in Malaysia, unless of course you're in a very good position. Most people would not be able to actually afford to travel and see the world. So that's the kind of advantages that I find here that I probably wouldn't be able to get in Malaysia.

Helena
40:07

Yeah. Okay, just one last question. So apart from Malaysian food, what other elements have you retained from being Malaysian? Like traditions, or hospitality?

E19
40:45

In terms of Malaysians and Singaporeans. Even in Asia, we are sort of like, known as like in a middle ground whereby we can actually have westernised and half able to relate to, I guess traditional Chinese sort of culture. And also, because, for us like, as Malaysians, we tend to work harder., Asians generally, I guess, we tend to work harder compared to our Western counterparts. And that has been an advantage for me at work, career wise, because you do get recognised. Clearly you get recognised for, if you put in a little bit more high work and a little bit smarter work, compared to the rest of the year. In a company of 100, in Malaysia, you probably have like 60% of the workers working as hard just as hard as you are. And obviously, then it's quite difficult for you to distinguish yourself to a certain extent, here, you just work a little bit harder, you work a little bit smarter, then you do get recognised for it. In terms of Malaysian sort of, I guess I don't know jokes, what you how you can relate to in terms of Malaysian humour, then yes, that's why I still retain quite a lot of that, myself, me and my wife, we tend to be quite relaxed when we are doing our own work when we are in each other's company. So, we use our lahs, we speak Malay if we don't really want my daughter to understand what we're talking about. Daughter knows some of the key words like "makan, sayang and pedas". So, I guess we really, we do retain a culture and because and we combined tons of languages in a single sentence. So, we were still very much Malaysian that way. And we feel quite natural. When in that situation, so yes. So big part of us we are still very Malaysian. We feel we're part of it. And we're not too shy, to shy away from it. Say for example, there was one time whereby we went on a cruise and the cruise ship was most of the people that were doing the service and everything else they were Indonesians. And then we started speaking in Malay and well which is quite similar to Bahasa. And he just always suddenly just there's a smile on our face and he just treated us nicer and

with a warm smile. So that's sort of stuff. So, we're still very, very much Malaysian to an extent.

E25

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Helena
00:00

Do I have your permission to ask you questions?

E25

Go ahead.

Helena
00:04

Okay, great. Could you tell me a bit about yourself, your name, your, age where you live now, your family details, how long you've been in England?

E25
00:14

Okay. By my full name is …. I'm 41 years old. I have been in London since 1997. Okay, so that's what I do now. When you say family, immediate family as a family where you live now. I don't have any family here. My family's in Malaysia. I've got a sibling and a half sibling and my mother, but I was brought up by my grandparents.

Helena
00:47

So, what did you do before?

E25
00:51

I actually was studying in PJ. And I was there until I was 14/15. And then I was lucky enough to go to Singapore to study. I went to the United world college. And after that, I got accepted to the chemical engineering, moved over here, and I didn't go back very much since then. Apart from that. Yeah, I was. You know, I've actually been thinking of moving back the last couple of years.

Helena
01:38

So, the reason for your migration was mainly for your education. And why UK?

E25
01:45

Well, I always wanted to come to London, because it was, especially UCL because it was very international. Yeah. And I mean, after going through the International School, the international content really appealed to me. So that's why London was my first choice. And they also gave me a real dummy office of the university. So, a no brainer, really.

Helena
02:09

Okay. And do you think has language played a part in your decision to migrate to the UK? I mean, English, the fact that you speak English? Was that one of the factors?

E25
02:20

I've never gave that that a thought, really. Honestly, it was just, I never thought about the language aspect. Okay, I guess, London or England, or America would be easier simply because all of you know, because, you know, they speak English.

Helena
02:38

I imagine if you had an offer to go to Germany, you know, would that entail in you having to learn another language?

E25
02:45

I wouldn't mind actually the company. I call Germany, like one of my actually… Munich, one of my favourite book… have been doing that nearly yearly since 1999. And I picked up German just fine, you know, learning for my friends and from speaking to people. It's not the best, but it's works.

Helena
03:05

And so, 24 years. Do you remember some of the processes or preparation that was required for your migration back then? Did you have to do an English test? Or was there any sort of, you know, paperwork? Any difficulties?

E25
03:20

That was a lifetime ago, I had to do a medical. Yes. And of course, the UK Government needed a source of funds to fund University. I remember really, okay. I think a lot of

the admin was done by a cousin of mine and my grandparents or my grandfather at that point, because my grandmother passed away.

Helena
03:44

I see. Okay, and is your migration a permanent one? Do you plan to go back? You said you might go back, and might want to come back?

E25
03:52

Yeah. Yes. The thought has been… answer is yes. It's not set in stone, but the plan was to take off, migrate back this year, but I don't think it's going to happen until next year but possibly. Yeah. I wouldn't… you can't pull anything permanent right now, you know, for a long time. But then you know, things change so, never say never. But to go back and give it a try. Because, by the way, if I ramble tell me to stop. Yeah. The thing is, it's I think, you know, it's about time to go back home and especially I think in Malaysia, the only resource we have left are the people there, the rakyat, and the way it's going I mean, maybe we can make a small change somewhere.

Helena
04:50

So, having said all that, do you feel Malaysian?

E25
04:54

I've always felt Malaysian, always.

Helena
04:56

Even after 24 years? I mean, do feel British somewhere, or sort of like, a hyphenated identity? Or is it…

E25
05:04

Hyphenated identity, yes. Yeah. I will call, you know, I wouldn't call myself British. I would say I'm a Londoner, because it's very different. It's very diverse. But as far as being Malaysian, I've always felt Malaysian, even though… it is my roots, right? I grew up there. It's my home country. But when you live in different places, you think or do things in a different way. And so, you take the best from both cultures, or as many

cultures to become yourself, I guess. But I think the problem is, it's like over here, you don't really fit in as British. But then when you go home, you don't fit in a 100% as a Malaysian.

Helena
05:45

Neither here nor there, isn't that right? So, have you ever had people see you as a local? Or maybe they see you as a foreigner?

E25
05:53

I wouldn't say a local I guess, a foreigner definitely simply because of simple traits in skin colour, for example. But London, as I said, is so diverse. So, I've never felt, I would, I've had a few experiences, unpleasant experiences with people but you know, you get that all around.

Helena
06:14

And how do you feel about the way people see you? Have you ever experienced any discrimination or racism the last 24 years?

E25
06:23

Yes, yes, I have, actually, a number of times. For example, this is one of the first experiences, was years ago. And over years ago, when some Irish woman was calling me chinky eyed and yellow, and all this, I just walked away. But with COVID, at the start of it, I was, you know, I've actually been like, someone down the road like these, these people on the balcony threw water at me saying "Go away Corona", or something like that. And I'd once, near Oxford Street I think, this guy was drunk. And anyway, he halted me and said something nasty, and I just, I just walked from it. So, this is recent, but this is very recent. I mean, I would say in the last year, I've had like I've have three encounters where simply because of the sort of COVID you know, people associate it with the Chinese. Yeah, so that's not been very pleasant, but it is what it is, you know, you just walk away.

Helena
07:22

And how did you settle in? Did you have any difficulties at the beginning? Any degree of assimilation or integration? Did you have to work on your accent? Perhaps? Or not?

E25
07:33

I think in that sense, assimilation not really because I had a lot of different friends, international friends. And we were all in the same boat. Really, it's not as if I''ve stuck with a bunch of English people. Again, to this day, like my bunch of friends, it's always … as far as accent I guess, like mine has changed a bit, but I went to an international school. But look, you know, it's funny when I go back home, within a few hours, the accent is gone. It just comes naturally.

Helena
08:14

And, would you say you belong where you live now? Do you feel like you belong there?

E25
08:20

Well, I don't anymore. I think I used to feel that I belonged. I do belong here. But again, I can't say 100% now because I'm thinking about going back.

Helena
08:35

And so, this next question is actually pre-covid. What do you do at the weekends? Do you go out with your friends? What are your hobbies? Just trying to find out some of your circle of friends actually. I mean, are they like a mix? So, you mentioned that you have a lot of mixed circle of friends, right?

E25
08:50

All right. What did I do pre-COVID on weekends, I would just hang out with friends go for dinners. Go out for drinks. And sorry, the question you were saying, like what was that about the friends?

Helena
09:06

A mixed circle of friends. So, they're not just British. They're all like mixed, a melting pot?

E25

09:14

It's always been a melting pot with me, and yeah, just hang out. I guess. I'm really into wine and food traveling. So, on some weekends, I would go visit some friends in Europe. You know, take a cheap flight and go. I mean, it has, you know, dinners or you know, spend time with some friends that have become family and who did not have kids and now I'm like, you know, Godfather, uncle and all this.

Helena
09:42

How do you feel about your ethnicity and religion? Do they help define who you are, or not?

E25
09:49

My ethnicity always defined me, I guess. I mean, again, I do the way Malaysia that, you know, the way the politics work and stuff like that. When you grow up, you listen to a lot of slurs against one race or the other jokes, which is one thing. Slurs are unacceptable on ethnicity. I would say I feel Malaysian first and then of Chinese descent second. And religion for me. Look, I'm more spiritual than religious. So, I wouldn't count that as like a main focal point.

Helena
10:29

And, are you involved in politics? Do you watch political programs or have discussions on politics with your family or friends?

E25
10:37

Oh, yes. Especially, I'm not really bothered that much about UK politics. I do speak about it, but mainly Malaysian politics. Right. And I'm also involved in or tried to get more involved in a few movements. Back home, which is simply, we want fair elections, we want non-partisan politics, you know, we want a fair representation. And we want people , you know, these will be our politicians who will fight for Malaysians, not for the own pockets, you know? So, that's something important.

Helena
11:12

Just going back. You mentioned earlier that you want to go back to make a difference, right?

E25
11:17

Yes. Yes. I thought this trying to… I've been supporting this movement by modular Malaysia called Kira independence, which we are trying to get 16 independent MPs in the parliament to represent and it is good that they're going to be chosen by meritocracy and not, you know, how, like, on the 11th hour in, you know, you have a new MP or new representative in your district before voting, and you're like, Who the hell is this guy, who chose this guy? Right? So, so yes, I am. I am a bit involved. And I do like discussions about how bad Malaysia is. And turning out, especially last year.

Helena
12:02

So, how do you feel… So, you sort of answered this question already. But how do you feel when you return to Malaysia? I mean, definitely, is there a difference now after your migration?

E25
12:15

A difference in how I feel or difference in what I see?

Helena
12:18

How you feel about things. I mean, you've already mentioned a few times about how you feel about politics and you want to make a difference. You want to change things there. Compared to before and now, do you see a big difference? Is it substantial?

E25
12:35

As far as the way the country has changed, especially if you're going back once every few years. Yeah, it's unrecognised, not unrecognisable, but very different from my youth when you look at all these new buildings, all these condos and stuff like that, the perception of politics. I think it's worse because I think you know, the politicians have been playing the race card, and divide and conquer and play one against each other. When we're growing up, it didn't matter whether you're Indian, Malay, Chinese. You just want to play you know, or like growing up, seeing like Deepavali, my grandparents used to… we used to go to our Hindu friends' houses. Chinese New Year, they'd come over. Raya we go to, you know, Malay friends' houses. So, you know, but now you can see a bit more segregation. Especially you get these crazy extremist spectrums as well

now. I'm saying that you know, people like you should go home and hold on to that place.

Helena
13:39

And after your migration, are there elements or sentiments that you might have retained? Being a Malaysian, like, do you still have a Malaysian palate for instance? Or hospitality?

E25
13:52

Being Malaysian I think, like, the first thing you miss about home is the food. Yes. Okay, family there of course, but food, definitely the food.

Helena
14:01

Food trumps family?

E25
14:05

So, the palate is still there. As far as what every day and I guess it's your upbringing as well as. The Asian upbringing, respect and culture and yeah. So that there is some part of that, but it's not as apparent here when you're back home. There's so many different festivals and stuff like that, you know, here Chinese New Year's not Chinese New Year.

Helena
14:35

Well, the next question actually, you've already answered which basically is… At the start of the conversation. Where do you see yourself in the future, which, you know, obviously for now, you're planning to go back to Malaysia and then you don't really know for how long. But yeah, okay. Gosh, I can't believe we're done. Um, do you have anything else that you'd like to add that I might have missed?

E25
15:01

And not really. I think if there's anything else you want to know, you're free to ask.

Helena
15:10

I mean yeah, I think we've pretty much covered everything.

Appendix 5: Tables

Table 2: Adapted - UK Ancestry visa. Source: UK Visa and Immigration government website

Who can apply	Eligibility	Duration of stay	Benefits
• Commonwealth citizens • British overseas citizens • British Overseas Territories citizens • British nationals (overseas) • Zimbabwe citizens	• 17 years and above • Sufficient funds for self-support. • Plan to work in the UK. Ancestry: - show proof of a grandparent born in one of the following locations: in the UK, the Channel Islands or the Isle of Man. - born before 31st March 1922 (in what is now Ireland) - on a ship/aircraft either registered in the UK or belonged to the UK government.	• 5 years Visa extension after 5 years: - apply for a further 5 years. - apply to settle permanently in the UK (apply for 'Indefinite Leave to Remain' and/or 'British Citizenship').	• Work, study and live in the UK without restrictions. • Spouse, civil or unmarried partner and dependant children can all benefit by joining visa holder in the UK. • Voting rights in UK elections.

Table 3: Adapted - The Right of Abode. Source: UK Visa and Immigration government website

Eligibility	Benefits	Restrictions
• All British citizens automatically have right of abode in the UK. • Some Commonwealth citizens may also have the right of abode: - became a British citizen on/or before 1 January 1983. - a UK and Colonies citizen and had your citizenship by being born/adopted/ naturalised/registered in the UK. Same applies for parents. - a UK and Colonies citizen before 1 January 1983,	• Unconditional right to enter, live, work and study in the United Kingdom. • Entitlement to use the UK/EEA/Switzerland immigration channel at United Kingdom ports of entry. • Entitlement to apply for UK social security and welfare benefits. • Right to vote, stand for public office in the UK. • Valid for life, no lapse regardless of stay duration outside the UK.	• Produce a passport when seeking to enter the UK. • Being refused entry where unable to produce a relevant UK passport. • Being refused entry where unable to produce a certificate of entitlement when seeking to enter. • Subject to a temporary exclusion order (CTSA 2015, ss 2–8), whether or not the person has also been

living in the UK for five years or more straight. - a UK and Colonies citizen and were then, or had previously been, the wife of a man with the right of abode in the UK. • Proof of the right of abode with a UK passport describing a British citizen/British subject with right of abode. - born in the UK after 31 December 1982 and one of your parents was then a British citizen or legally settled in the UK. - born outside the UK after 31 December 1982 and one parent was a British citizen other than by descent (for example, by naturalisation, registration or birth). - registered/naturalised as a British citizen after 31 December 1982. • Certificates of entitlement - a certificate of entitlement to the right of abode in the UK is placed in a valid passport, constitutes proof of right of abode for UK immigration control purposes.		issued with a permit to return.

Table 4: Adapted - Skilled Worker visa. Source: UK Visa and Immigration government website

Eligibility	Benefits	Restrictions
• Home Office approved UK employer. • A 'certificate of sponsorship' from employer. • A minimum salary depending on employment.	• Visa up to 5 years. • Visa extension application unlimited as long as still meet eligibility requirements. • After 5 years, eligible to apply for permanent settlement in the UK - Indefinite Leave to Remain (the right to live, work	• Apply for most benefits (public funds), or the State Pension • Change jobs or employer, unless apply to update visa.

• A confirmed job offer prior to visa application. • Application fee, healthcare surcharge, proof of sufficient personal funds. • Knowledge of English - able to speak, read, write and understand English. - must show proof of English proficiency.	and study here for as long as you like, and apply for benefits if eligible). • Bring partner/children as 'dependants' if eligible. • Take on additional work in certain circumstances/ voluntary work. • Travel abroad and return to the UK.	

Table 5: Adapted - Spouse visa/Fiancé visa/Family permit. Source: UK Visa and Immigration government website

Spouse	Fiancé	Family
• Must be 18 years old +. • Must have met each other and be legally married. • Must intend to live together permanently. • Must have sufficient money to support (and any dependents) without claiming public funds. • Sponsoring partner must earn more than £18,600 per year or have sufficient funds to sponsor. (higher if also sponsoring dependent children). • Must have suitable accommodation. • Must satisfy the English language requirements: - if not a national of a majority English-speaking country/do not have a degree taught in English, then need to pass an English language test from an approved test provider. - If applying from overseas, make arrangements to take an approved English language test in home country.	• In addition to a Spouse visa: - show that any previous relationship that has ended (whether it was as a married or an unmarried couple) - entry to the UK for six months during which time must marry fiancé in the UK.	• The spouse/civil partner of an EEA or Swiss national. • A descendant (child or grandchild) of the EEA national or their spouse/civil partner under 21. • A dependent descendant (child or grandchild) of the EEA national or their spouse/civil partner aged 21 +. • A dependant relative in the ascending line (i.e. parents or grandparents) of an EEA or Swiss national or his/her spouse/civil partner. • The EEA-national partner must be self-employment, study, employed in the UK. • The non-EEA family member and the EEA national must either be legally married to each other or be able to provide evidence of living together within the most recent

• Eligible to work/study in the UK. • Eligible to switch to a spouse visa, if already in the UK on a fiancé visa/work visa/student visa valid for more than six months. • Initially issued for 33 months. If applying from within the UK, a spouse visa is issued for 30 months. • Eligible for an extension for an additional 30 months which can take into account total time in the UK on this visa up to five years. At this point, can apply for Indefinite Leave to Remain provided still married and living in the UK with spouse and continue to meet the maintenance requirements. • Sit for Life in the UK Test. • After ILR, eligible to apply for naturalisation as British citizen.		two years (unmarried couples). • The non-EEA family member and the EEA national must have met already. • The non-EEA family member and the EEA national must demonstrate intent to live together. • The non-EEA family member and the EEA national must be travelling to the UK together, or the EEA national should already be in the UK. • The family unit must not be dependent on public funds whilst in the United Kingdom. • Valid for 6 months, during which time the EEA-national partner is expected to apply for a Residence Permit. • Issued for 5 years, after which can apply for Indefinite Leave to Remain in the UK. • Sit for Life in the UK Test.

Table 6: Adapted - Points-based Immigration System. Source: UK Visa and Immigration government website

Tier	Non-EEA (European Economic Area) applicants
1	• General: - highly skilled workers *(former HSMP (closed to non-EEA) and PSW for international students closed).* • Graduate Entrepreneur: - permits recent graduates to open a business in the UK. • Entrepreneur: - permits migrant to establish themselves in business within the UK. • Investor: - persons who want to make an investment of at least £2,000,000 in the UK. • Exceptional Talent: - persons considered to have exceptional talent in their field of expertise.
2	• General: - persons offered a skilled job in a position that cannot be filled by a UK settled person. • Minister of Religion: - ministers, priests or missionaries offered a position in a faith-based community within the UK. • Sportsperson:

	- elite athletes/coaches internationally recognised at highest level of competition. • Intra-Company Transfer: - employees of multinational companies transferred to a UK branch organisation.
3	• Low-skilled workers: - originally used during temporary labour shortages *(currently suspended).*
4	• General Student: - education post 16 years old within the UK. • Child Student: - children between 4-16 years old to attend an independent school to continue education in the UK.
5	• Creative and Sporting: - entertainers, athletes, or creative artists. • Charity Workers: - people to participate in voluntary charity work. • Religious Workers: - to work as a part of a faith-based community i.e.: preaching/ministry/ pastoral work. • Government Authorised Exchange: - people under a government approved programme to promote sharing of knowledge/ experience/ best practice. • International Agreement: - people under contract covered under international law such as the GATS agreement. • Youth Mobility Scheme: - young people participating country wishing to experience life in the UK *(previously the working holidaymaker)*.

ABSTRACT

This thesis, entitled *The Quest for Identity: Migration and Cultural Hybridity of the Malaysian Diaspora in the United Kingdom*, delves into the complex interplay of migration, identity formation, and cultural hybridity among the Malaysian diaspora in the United Kingdom. It begins by exploring the elusive and multifaceted nature of identity, highlighting its influence on thoughts, behaviours, and interactions. The thesis emphasises the importance of collective identity and the social fabric of human existence, demonstrating how shared identities foster belonging and connectivity. It also explores the dynamic and fluid nature of identity in societal contexts, where individuals continuously renegotiate their sense of self amidst changing cultural, social, and global landscapes.

Central to this exploration is the impact of migration on identity. The thesis examines how migration prompts individuals to redefine their sense of self in relation to new group identities, focusing on emotional and foundational aspects such as nationality, religion, culture, and ethnicity. It argues that the presence of diverse ethnic groups in the United Kingdom challenges and redefines the boundaries of national identity, particularly the notion of Britishness. This is further complicated by the historical colonial relationship between Malaysia and the United Kingdom, which has left a lasting impact on the interactions and power structures between the two nations.

The thesis presents the Malaysian diaspora as a case study to illustrate the fluidity and multiplicity of identity in the context of migration. It discusses how Malaysians in the United Kingdom navigate the liminal realms between their cultural heritage and their current context in Britain, creating a unique blend of identities. This process is facilitated by the interaction between Malaysian and British cultures, giving rise to a novel, distinct entity that transcends mere cultural blending.

Furthermore, the thesis explores the integration and assimilation of the Malaysian diaspora into British society, including the formation of communities, adaptation of culinary traditions, and religious practices. It also addresses the political implications of changing immigration policies and Brexit on the Malaysian community, as well as employment trends that affect their economic stability and social mobility.

In conclusion, this thesis aims to provide a comprehensive analysis of the Malaysian diaspora in the United Kingdom, shedding light on the process of migration, identity formation, and integration. It underscores the continuous negotiation of identity, belonging, and loyalty

within the interstices of cultural, political, and social landscapes, reminding us of the fluidity of identity—a “moveable feast” in the “Third Space” shaped by our interactions with the world around us.

Keywords: Migration, integration, assimilation, multiculturalism, diaspora, hybrid identity, ethnocultural identity, Third Space, cultural hybridity, sense of belonging.

ABSTRAIT

Cette thèse, intitulée *The Quest for Identity : Migration and Cultural Hybridity of the Malaysian Diaspora in the United Kingdom*, se penche sur l'interaction complexe de la migration, de la formation de l'identité et de l'hybridité culturelle au sein de la diaspora malaisienne au Royaume-Uni. Il commence par explorer la nature insaisissable et multidimensionnelle de l'identité, en soulignant son influence sur les pensées, les comportements et les interactions. La thèse souligne l'importance de l'identité collective et du tissu social de l'existence humaine, démontrant comment les identités partagées favorisent l'appartenance et la connectivité. Il explore également la nature dynamique et fluide de l'identité dans des contextes sociétaux, où les individus renégocient continuellement leur sens de soi dans des paysages culturels, sociaux et mondiaux changeants.

Au cœur de cette exploration se trouve l'impact de la migration sur l'identité. La thèse examine comment la migration incite les individus à redéfinir leur sens de soi par rapport aux nouvelles identités de groupe, en se concentrant sur les aspects émotionnels et fondamentaux tels que la nationalité, la religion, la culture et l'ethnicité. Il soutient que la présence de divers groupes ethniques au Royaume-Uni remet en question et redéfinit les frontières de l'identité nationale, en particulier la notion d'identité britannique. La situation est encore compliquée par la relation coloniale historique entre la Malaisie et le Royaume-Uni, qui a laissé un impact durable sur les interactions et les structures de pouvoir entre les deux nations.

La thèse présente la diaspora malaisienne comme une étude de cas pour illustrer la fluidité et la multiplicité de l'identité dans le contexte de la migration. Il traite de la façon dont les Malaisiens du Royaume-Uni naviguent dans les royaumes liminaux entre leur héritage culturel et leur contexte actuel en Grande-Bretagne, créant un mélange unique d'identités. Ce processus est facilité par l'interaction entre les cultures malaisienne et britannique, donnant naissance à une entité nouvelle et distincte qui transcende le simple mélange culturel.

En outre, la thèse explore l'intégration et l'assimilation de la diaspora malaisienne dans la société britannique, y compris la formation de communautés, l'adaptation des traditions culinaires et les pratiques religieuses. Il aborde également les implications politiques de l'évolution des politiques d'immigration et du Brexit sur la communauté malaisienne, ainsi que les tendances de l'emploi qui affectent leur stabilité économique et leur mobilité sociale.

En conclusion, cette thèse vise à fournir une analyse complète de la diaspora malaisienne au Royaume-Uni, en mettant en lumière le processus de migration, de formation identitaire et

d’intégration. Il souligne la négociation continue de l’identité, de l’appartenance et de la loyauté dans les interstices des paysages culturels, politiques et sociaux, nous rappelant la fluidité de l’identité – un « moveable feast » dans le « Third Space » façonné par nos interactions avec le monde qui nous entoure.

Mots-clés : Migration, intégration, assimilation, multiculturalisme, diaspora, identité hybride, identité ethnoculturelle, *Third Space*, hybridité culturelle, sentiment d’appartenance.